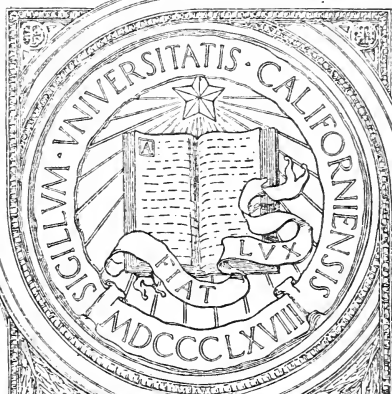


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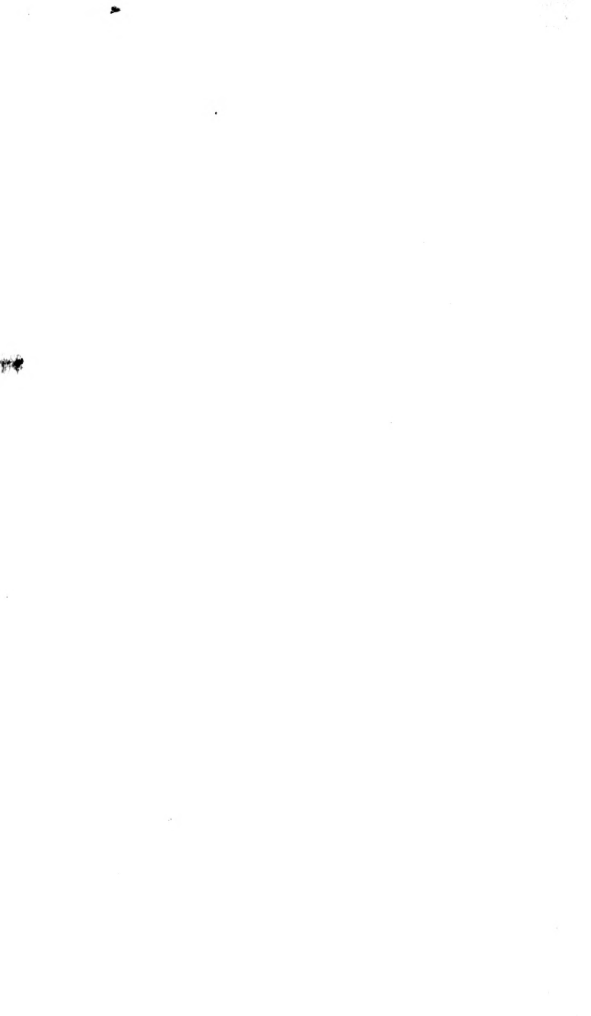


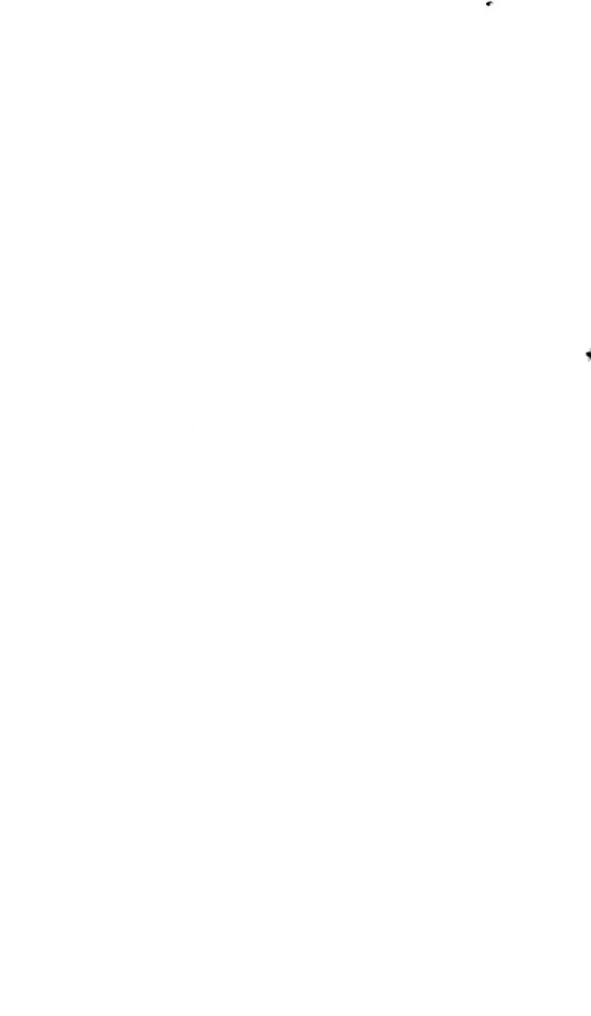
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# Contemporary Writers

*Edited by* W. ROBERTSON NICOLL, LL.D.

THOMAS HARDY

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# THOMAS HARDY

BY

ANNIE MACDONELL

LONDON

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1894

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PORTRAIT OF THOMAS HARDY . . . *Frontispiece*

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# INTRODUCTORY



# I

## INTRODUCTORY

THERE can be no attempt at finality in a criticism of Mr. Hardy: he is now in the full vigour of his genius, and he has well prepared us for surprises. But the volume of his work is already large; and there is a natural delight in counting and sifting a heap of treasure, even though the pile is being added to while our hands are in it, and its net value being possibly altered. And if this—be it personal gratification, or pious homage to the source of the treasure—is not reason enough for one more attempt to appraise it, I have no other. Mr. Hardy is lucid: he needs no explanation; no apology: his work can defend itself; and

he has probably all the popularity he desires. But he presents abundance of points for study, and though his unexpected developments have been many, and his caprices not a few, some distinctive features are clearly enough traceable from his earliest to his most recent page to prevent a criticism of his work being a thing of shreds and patches.

Touching and influencing the main streams of art and thought to-day at certain points, at others standing far apart from them, Mr. Hardy holds just now a position of special interest ; and in the long line of English novelists his is a noticeable figure. He has made really new departures which are no mere accidents of the day he has lived in ; he has resisted some impulses of his time as sturdily as in other directions he has been a revolutionary. You may quote him as an example of the observance, and as a warning against the breach, of the same canons of criticism if you happen to hold

with any. He is that interesting subject, a writer that cannot be labelled. Ready-made theories about realism, naturalism, and romanticism, are misfits as applied to him : his methods are as wayward as the loves of his heroines.

In spite of the modern habit of diligently searching for a writer's literary parentage, a criticism of Mr. Hardy may start from himself. The sun and wind of other minds shone and blew on him, of course, and fed his growth, and there are marks for all who read closely that certain men and books have left on him strong imprints. But he has been nobody's docile pupil. He has disciplined himself well in thinking and observing, and his eye and ear are naturally quick and true. But for style and form, pattern and tone, he has gone to school just when and where he liked. The worse for the smoothness of the web, and its value among dealers who judge by rule of thumb. But there are other tests.

Among the many blunders that line the path of the random art of literary criticism, perhaps none has been more unintelligent than that which attributed Mr. Hardy's first widely-known story to George Eliot. The guess seems wild now, but the notion still remains that her influence was great in the shaping of his literary methods. So it may have been : it is a point better settled by information than by internal evidence, which is far from distinct. In a few instances his humour looks as if it had meant to be after a George Eliot pattern, but had turned out something entirely different. The best novels of both have rustic backgrounds ; both have made prominent the speech and humours of English peasants ; both are marked by a strong intellectual fibre. But in aim, style, and temperament, it would be difficult to name two writers of fiction more dissimilar. And of no other novelist does he call up a clear remembrance : certainly no very profitable comparison can be made between

him and his contemporaries. In one point, in his representation of the ceaseless warring of human nature with itself and fatal circumstance, his final aim, he puts us in mind of Balzac, and as soon as the likeness is named the great differences in their methods rise up to obscure it.

Kinship he has with other writers, but they are not writers of fiction, and they are of another time than ours. He has borrowed; but his borrowings have been open and audacious. Where he is not looking with his own peculiarly independent gaze at the world, it is nobody less than Shakespeare that has lent him eyesight. This, of course, does not affect Mr. Hardy's rank in literature: whatever it may be he has earned it by other qualities than skill in adaptation. Nor has it reference to the fact that the novelist at his supremest moments is a tragedian. It is Shakespeare's lighter vein, as 'fancy's child,' that the skill of the storyteller has adapted to the interpretation of an

England two and a half centuries older. Some of Mr. Hardy's much loved and exasperating heroines are Shakespearian. His rustics are of his own Wessex soil, but perhaps Shakespeare gave him the courage and example to extract and distil their wit in defiance of what stands for probability in minds of conventional experience. Fancy, a rare quality, plays out and in persistently amid the gloomiest scenes of the Wessex stories ; for the novelist of to-day whose final aim points most clearly to the tragedy of life, is yet the one of all others who best recalls that the careless airy brightness of an earlier world is unexhausted yet—a brightness, by the by, having nothing to do with happiness, being rather a gleam of outside sunshine, elfish and irresponsible, taking little account of the reason for living or of its futility, but very nearly concerned with its possibility.

Mr. Hardy began his literary career with a stock of thoughts and a view of life considerably in advance of, or different from, those



of the majority of his contemporaries. The distinctly intellectual quality of his genius has hardly been adequately recognised, and indeed this feature is apt to be ignored in a novelist, save where it is out of proportion to the imaginative powers, as in the case of George Eliot. Fearless thinking and a sense of humour having been his from the first, he has rarely been taken unawares and captured by the fashions and crazes among his fellow-craftsmen at any moment. In his time we have had the psychological, the historico-romantic, the neurotic, the erotic, the photographic, and many another school, and each has looked on itself as the advance guard. Mr. Hardy has contributed to more than one, and joined none. Yet he is still, admittedly, in England, the leader into freer paths. Peculiarly unprofessional in tone, he never echoes the literary club, coterie, or review, and in a generation fussily proud of all its little efforts at thinking, which makes continual discovery of problems, and many

solemn statements of them, he has not very often worn his serious purposes on his sleeve. But you will find good thought and earnestness wrought closely into the fibre of his work—enough of these to bar his way to any very wide popularity—and he has impressively dramatised a problem or two, neither particularly new nor old, but of a kind to be met with so long as our present civilisation lasts. Now standing aloof from the time, and again its ally, but never enrolled in the regular army, he has been a valiant free-lance.

THE PROGRESS OF A  
NOVELIST

I



## II

# THE PROGRESS OF A NOVELIST

### I

THOMAS HARDY was born near Dorchester, June 2, 1840, and he lives in Dorchester now. That only a little portion of his life has been spent away from that neighbourhood is the most significant fact of his biography. Wessex, with its natural beauty, its remoteness, its lingering old world customs, has been not merely a picturesque background to his tales. They have grown in Wessex air, and he has dug them out of Wessex soil. In most other novels the scenery could be altered with little effect

on the action or the characters. In Mr. Hardy's it is always inevitable and organic. There has been in recent years a strong revival of local sentiment, and folk-lore, fiction, and pictorial art have reflected it. The very restlessness of modern life has nourished a love for some abiding-place, where the heart and the imagination can turn to for a home and for repose; and regret for the old world so quickly passing away has inspired many picturesque chroniclers. [The spirit of nationalism, one of the strongest motive-powers of the century, has had this as its local counterpart.] But Mr. Hardy's attachment, and his choice of habitation for the creatures of his imagination, are almost too personal to be set down to the contagion of a movement. [White has not Selborne more precisely in his eye; Wordsworth has not with greater love interpreted the soul of the hills and lakes he was born amongst; Burns and Ayrshire have not a closer association.] And no other

writer of fiction has been at once so truthful and so poetic a historian of his county. You will more easily find a parallel among painters than among men of letters.

It was perhaps fortunate that Mr. Hardy's education enabled him to be early obedient to his own instincts. He could never have been one of the 'hall-marked young men,' lightly satirised by himself, one of 'the unimpeachable models turned out yearly by the lathe of a systematic tuition': his humanity and originality would always have been stronger than his education. With a strictly conventional training he might have been more of the man of letters; he might have been considerably less of the dramatist of life. In his seventeenth year he was articled to an ecclesiastical architect in Dorchester, and the traces of this apprenticeship, and of his studies for his profession, are plainly evident in his writing, in the precision with which he describes a building or a neighbourhood, and notes position,

distance, and proportion. Very probably it strengthened his love of pictorial art, and indirectly had not a little to do with the fact that he comes nearer to having the vision and using the methods of a painter than any other novelist one could name. His work, too, gave him roving errands about the county—when he stored another kind of capital than professional skill—for to his master had been entrusted the restoration of many of the old South Dorsetshire churches.

But architecture did not, even in those early days, absorb all his thoughts and energies, and for the next four years he was a diligent student of literature, more especially of classics and theology. At the age of twenty Mr. Hardy came to London, to pursue his profession, and there attached himself to the modern Gothic school, working under the distinguished architect Sir Arthur Blomfield, and helping him in the restoration of several churches in the neigh-



bourhood of London. Sir Arthur Blomfield is painter as well as architect, and probably his influence over his pupil was still more in the direction of fostering his love of art than of training him in design. In 1863, the prize and medal of the Institute of British Architects was awarded to the competitor who wrote, under the motto, 'Tentavi quid in congeneri possem,' an essay on 'Coloured Brick and Terra Cotta Architecture.' This was Mr. Hardy's first public success, and in the same year he received Sir W. Tite's prize for architectural design. These are all his recorded separate efforts in his early profession, though he continued to pursue it seriously for some years, and the final choice between architecture and literature was probably not made till 1874.

On his arrival in London he had entered as a student of modern languages at King's College, and side by side with his profession literature was asserting claims on his time and interest. A little paper, 'How I built

myself a House,' which appeared in *Chambers' Journal*, in 1865, is probably his first published work. It is not technical, as might be supposed from its title, but a slight and humorous sketch of the experience of two enthusiastic young house-keepers, with awful warnings as to expenses and unexpected happenings in the dangerous amusement of house-building. But the leisure of the years that elapsed between his coming to London and the publication of his first novel was devoted to poetry, not to fiction. There is probably more in this than the mere conventional beginning of almost every literary career. Mr. Hardy is first of all a poet, if his other gifts and ambitions sometimes tend to obscure the fact, and though the world has not had much chance of gauging his skill in metrical form. Publishers behaved just as usual, and made no eager move to welcome another young man's verses. The album verse in 'Desperate

Remedies ' is not his only metrical composition in print, but the magazines were not very hospitable to what consumed the best ardour of Mr. Hardy's mind for several years; and the book of poems that has been so frequently the future prose writer's introduction to the world, in his case mostly remained in manuscript.

At last he took to novel-writing, and ' Desperate Remedies ' was published anonymously, by Messrs. Tinsley, in 1871. Though it had its share of abuse, its reception was such as to place him within the first outposts of success. But his years of patient training, and his observant youth in Wessex, had soon a finer result. By one of the unaccountable leaps, some backward, some forward, which have marked Mr. Hardy's progress, this vigorous but somewhat awkward story was followed, a year after, by another, which for beauty of workmanship and charm he has never surpassed, ' Under the Greenwood Tree.' ' A Pair of

Blue Eyes' appeared in 1873. It was not, however, till the practically unqualified success in 1874 of 'Far from the Madding Crowd,' which appeared in *Cornhill* in that year, that Mr. Hardy's career seemed to be finally settled. Five years later this novel, perhaps, not even excepting 'Tess,' the most popular of his works, was dramatised by himself. A version of it, written in collaboration with Mr. Comyns Carr, in which occur some modifications of the plot, was performed, in February 1882, at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, Liverpool, Miss Marion Terry playing Bathsheba, that part being taken by Mrs. Bernard Beere when it appeared on the London stage, at the Globe, in May of the same year. His only other dramatised work is 'The Three Wayfarers,' based on 'The Three Strangers,' one of the 'Wessex Tales,' performed, with four other one act plays, at Terry's Theatre in June 1893.

Since his renunciation of architecture his

literary life has not been spent in London. Returning to Wessex he finally settled at Dorchester, where he now lives. Mr. Hardy's developments may yet be many, and only one thing can be foreseen with any degree of certainty, that Wessex will still be the stage where his dramas will play. Not only has he old memories to fall back on and suggest his scenes and stories: by choice, all his present working days are spent where Wessex cannot be out of sight or mind. Just below him, on the north, lies the Frome Valley, with glimpses of the wild heath country beyond; towards the sea, Blackdown with his namesake's monument stands conspicuous to the right; nearer on the same side are the great ramparts of Mai-Dun, and in front the rolling downs of 'The Trumpet Major.'

There he has written with regularity, but not too prolifically, the order of his works, after those already named, being, 'The Hand of Ethelberta,' 1876; 'The Return of the

Native,' 1878; 'The Trumpet Major,' 1880; 'A Laodicean,' 1881; 'Two on a Tower,' 1882; 'The Mayor of Casterbridge,' 1886; 'The Woodlanders,' 1886-7; 'Wessex Tales,' 1888; 'A Group of Noble Dames,' 1891; 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles,' 1892; 'The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved,' 1892; 'Life's Little Ironies,' 1894. Mr. Hardy has been also an infrequent contributor to periodical literature in other directions than fiction. Among his more notable articles are, one on 'The Dorset Labourer' in *Longman's Magazine* of July 1893—an interesting commentary on the material for the Wessex novels, and an obituary notice of the Rev. William Barnes, the Dorset poet, which appeared in the *Athenæum* of October 16, 1886. Barnes was his near neighbour—two fields only divide his house from the rectory of Winterborne Came—and the difference in age, temperament, and point of view, did nothing to prevent a warm friendship between the

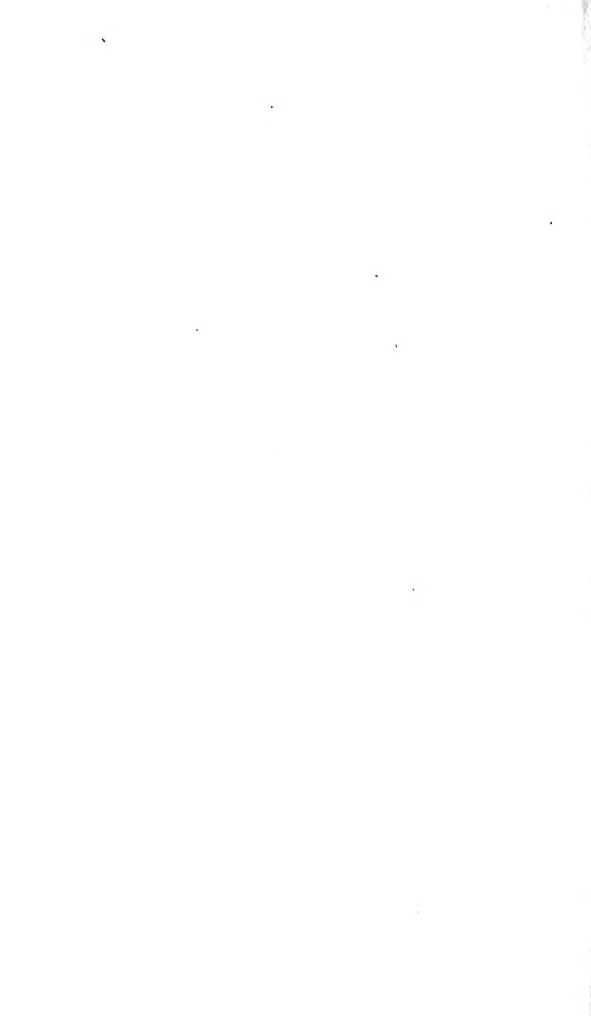
two men who, each in his own way, have finely interpreted the life and character of the county they have both loved so well. Dorset has been singularly fortunate in the loyalty as in the gifts of two such sons.





THE PROGRESS OF A  
NOVELIST

II



### III

## THE PROGRESS OF A NOVELIST

#### II

THE republication of 'Desperate Remedies' in 1892 gave a new and wider circulation to Mr. Hardy's earliest work of fiction. Markedly unlike most of the later books in its surface tones, the difference is yet mainly one of season rather than of climate; and as the story contains the germs of almost every idea, talent, and tendency to be found in his work since its appearance, it is as worthy of close attention as some of the better books.

'Desperate Remedies' was published

anonymously in 1871. On its title-page it bore a quotation from Scott, a manifesto in defence of its construction rather than a motto,—‘Though an unconnected course of adventures is what most frequently occurs in nature, yet the province of the romance-writer being artificial, there is more required from him than a mere compliance with the simplicity of reality.’ And indeed he has selected, arranged, and adapted the events with much thoroughness. It is a story of plot and sensation, the incidents precisely adjusted to a complicated plan, workman-like rather than attractive, the novel of one who, making up his mind to construct an elaborate plot, straightway did it without bungling or breakdown, but not with the convincing success of an equally complicated story of sensation, say, by Wilkie Collins. A feature, or perhaps, a freak of the book, its divisions into sections headed, ‘The Events of Thirty Years,’ ‘The Events of a Fortnight,’ ‘The Events of a Day and a

Night,' and so on, has a look of being part of the painstaking plan. Whatever its intention, it serves but a slight purpose, though it marks a precision which Mr. Hardy afterwards transferred, and with greater effect, from time to place. It is also a novel of character; there are no puppets, though some of the more important personages are a little rigid in their movements. A Wessex story, the rustic humours and humourists, to many readers the most prominent feature of Mr. Hardy's tales, are here already, and Clerk Crickett, the 'kind of Bowdlerised rake,' is surpassed by few of the later wits.

The frankness of conception and of language, more or less a determined purpose all along, began in this earliest novel. The story turns largely on the secret breach of the social code of morality by a young and inexperienced woman, who afterwards came to such a position as made the discovery of her secret dangerous; on her contrivance to introduce her unrecognising son into her

employment; and her resolve to effect a marriage between him and the daughter of a later, honourable, and disappointed lover. The design, joined in by Manston, the son, who has already a wife, leads to deep plotting and eventually to murder. Such a story can hardly be called agreeable, but the insistence is on the dramatic action rather than on the sordid detail of the tragedy. In the recent edition there has been considerable verbal revision, for the most part unimportant, the Bowdlerisation of a word or two not being of a character to give any particular interest to the earlier version. The complacency with life and the tragic despair of it that mark most young men's novels are both absent, an austere facing of its ills taking their place. In the melodramatic parts even, a firm intellectual grip of life is felt, and the philosophy not dramatised into situations or characters, if a trifle wordily expressed, is firsthand and never flimsy. A Nature painter of the rarest

kind he proved himself from the beginning, and the love of picturesque circumstance which has inspired some of his greatest moments, as it has also allied itself on less fortunate occasions to melodrama, is already a feature. In a story where sorrow and evil assert themselves in their full power, and with a forbidding aspect, the little scene is gratefully remembered where, on Cytherea's wedding-day with Manston, she and Springrove touch hands and bid farewell with the flowing stream between them. The style is vigorous and ambitious, but it is also that of a bookish man whose pen has not gained agility. It is a style that Mr. Hardy re-adopts from time to time, suggesting conscientious drill more than spontaneous exercise; it is the language of dissertation and exposition rather than of art.

Such is the novel Mr. Hardy first sent out to the world, for the material in it, for its thoroughness and grip, remarkable in itself, but specially interesting read in the light

of the later work. For a first book by an anonymous writer, it was not received badly. Indeed the *Saturday* welcomed it with enthusiasm. It was dubbed 'unpleasant' but 'powerful' by another leading organ of literary opinion, the reviewer being a little puzzled as to the sex of the writer, though he hoped it was not by 'an English lady.' For a certain outspokenness of language it was duly reproved.

'Under the Greenwood Tree' is called on its title-page, 'A Rural Picture of the Dutch School,' and there is in it a good deal of the vigorous trust in homely detail that reminds one of Jan Steen and Van Ostade. But the transcript has been made by a poet's hand. To not a few the book appears as Mr. Hardy's surest claim to recognition in another age, inasmuch as it is least coloured by the dusty complexion of ours. All but flawless in workmanship, its tone and humour are of the kindest. Nature and human nature, in sleepy woodland hamlets, are



seen, not with the vagueness of a roving lover of the picturesque, but with an eye that has noted how the light falls upon the leaves at all the hours and all the seasons, and read the minutest meaning of the smiles that play round rustic lips. You may put it on the shelf with the 'Vicar of Wakefield' and Walton and 'As You Like It,' but its piquancy will make it best neighbour to the last. It is an untraditional idyll: Arcadia with a savour.

For all the intimacy with rural habit and character it reveals, Mr. Hardy is not amongst the literalists. 'Under the Greenwood Tree' is the picture of a mood, of the conscious glee and the unconscious humour of country life, a mood of which the sum is large enough, counted by the broken experiences of it in every country heart, but which needs, as well as a light hand to paint it, an eye that can divert itself for a time from yesterday's pain and the view of to-morrow's drudgery, and see it as it exists to each, at happy

times, the sole mood of all the world. The story bubbles over with pure fun; its romance is as fresh and gentle as a spring morning. It is the comedy of country life meeting its lighter poetry. The shadows lying outside the sunny spot never obtrude. You can't make a tragedy out of Fancy's 'I like Dick, 'and I love him; but how poor and mean a 'man looks in the rain, with no umbrella, 'and wet through!' and you needn't out of 'those beautiful eyes of hers—too refined 'and beautiful for a tranter's wife; but, 'perhaps, not too good.' And the shadow creeps no nearer among the leaves and scents of Yalbury wood and the sunshine of simple hearts, amid the buzz of cottage mirth and the twang of fiddles at Christmas merry-makings.

'A Pair of Blue Eyes' is not a Wessex novel, the scene lying in a remote Cornish parish and in London. Sophisticated folks play parts in it, and play them indifferently. It holds its place in readers' affections by its


strange love story, by the vagaries of the heroine, and the genuine unaccented pathos of the end. Elfride is one of Mr. Hardy's special maidens. Whatever her deservings, she is remembered by readers as she is treated by her creator, with the tenderness called out by beautiful things that die young. A charming child, who 'says things worthy ' of a French epigrammatist, and acts like a ' robin in a greenhouse,' she has the variableness of a subtle nature and the promise of a woman of passion; she fibs, makes terrible mistakes, and yet deserves somehow by her nature, if not by her acts, the love of the three men who mourned over her in the Luxellian family vault. It is a story of memorable scenes, and with much beauty in the circumstances and the setting. The tragic note of the battle with the inevitable in nature is first struck here with a deep sound. Technically less elaborate, it is still, from a craftsman's point of view, a great advance on 'Desperate Remedies,' to which it seems

naturally the successor, and it stirs one's sympathies much more readily and lastingly.

Turning back now to 'A Pair of Blue Eyes,' its most interesting feature is seen to be the foreshadowing in it of Angel Clare's part in Tess's tragedy. Knight, though a priggish London reviewer, is a robust, if less picturesque figure than Angel: but their point of view is the same. Personally Knight had a better case for himself, but according to social conventions, in spite of Elfride's fibs, he had less cause for his prudish cruelty. The situation wants the tragic circumstances that occur in 'Tess'; otherwise it is the same: the casting off of the warmest love by a man who finds that an earlier story, into which he did not enter, contains what does not fit in with his conventional code for the ideal of womankind.

Perhaps 'Far from the Madding Crowd' is still, as it was for long, the most popular of Mr. Hardy's stories, in spite of the fact that it exemplifies all the qualities, though

not all of them at their strongest, by which he has given offence. When it appeared in book form, his name for the first time on a title-page, his recognition as a writer of unusual vigour was immediate ; it was a recognition, nevertheless, modified by so much criticism, that the succeeding books had still to fight their way. It presents a greater variety of moods than any of the others. The range and room of English country life for purposes of fiction he first proved in this story, which is at once comedy, tragedy, idyll, rustic chronicle, and shepherd's calendar. Into no other book has he put such close and lavish work ; none is more vivacious, more characteristic ; it contains the essence of his genius. In reading it first of all—and it has introduced Mr. Hardy to many—you have the feeling of crossing or climbing something before reaching the level of full appreciation, a sensation to some extent, of course, marking every first acquaintance with a writer of originality. The feeling



is not experienced in the same degree in any of the other novels. (His individuality lies in his 'humour,' to use the word in its older sense, in his love for the unexpected, the impulsive, the vivid, in human nature and incident, in his delight in upsetting the minor proprieties, and making mock of the solemnity of petty conventions. Bathsheba's prank of sending the valentine to Boldwood is typical of this somewhat impish temper. His 'humour' is what those critics have in mind who accuse him of a want of taste. There is something bristling in Mr. Hardy; there is little or no placidity; and not only in his defiant temper do you feel this.) His very virtues add to the effect, the vividness of his pictures, the complex interest of his characters, the heat of the emotions he expresses. He is always awake and strenuous; there is hardly a comfortable sleepy corner in one of his stories. Perhaps that is why he jars on some nerves, though his holding the conventions as mostly of little account

has been his chief cause of offence. In his novels the middle classes have their due share of representation, and I do not call to mind any passage in which he has gibed at them, or treated them otherwise than honourably. But he is not their novelist. The calm orderliness, the prudence, the respectability—the conditions by which they keep their comfortable position—are not the qualities he finds most interesting. Bathsheba so typifies his unconventionality in minor matters that ‘Far from the Madding Crowd’ is an excellent starting-point for making his nearer acquaintance, apart from the fact that it represents his powers at their full compass, though not at their mellowest.

In ‘The Hand of Ethelberta,’ a London and a Wessex story, light satire is the prevailing note. If the Society scenes are not admirable, they, at least, provide the contrast that makes the piquant comedy in the history of the heroine. Ethelberta is the daughter of a highly respectable family

butler, shoved up into an equality with the great folks whom her father waits on, by her graces and talents more even than by her marriage with an aristocratic minor who died in their honeymoon. For the sake of a numerous band of lowly brothers and sisters she fights for position, and lives in a perpetual conspiracy to hide or disguise their existence and the other *postscenia vite* for the sake of that same position. The much sought lady of many suitors, her difficulties never give her heart a chance, and she ends as the wife of an old noble rake. The bitterness of the facts is hardly expressed in the tone, and the underside of the beautiful and vivacious Ethelberta, a dogged family faithfulness, keeps her history wholesome. A very lively story is made out of the shifts of the household which she rules as mistress, and where brother Joey is page-boy, and sisters Gwendoline and Cornelia are cook and housemaid, and out of the contrasts of her two lives, one spent in regulating the minutest



## THE PROGRESS OF A NOVEL

details of the life of her humble family, other in charming London drawing-rooms by her poems and wit. The Anglebury rustics, as well as the Chickerel family, supply humorous by-play, and the London scenes some smart gibes at fashionable frigidities. Here, as in 'A Pair of Blue Eyes,' the weary strife against the senseless class feeling in English society is dramatised, but true to the note struck in the sub-title, 'A Comedy in Chapters,' and to the essentially practical nature of the heroine, neither this struggle nor the worldly marriage that ends it is presented in a tragic light. On the whole it is an amusing story, rising occasionally to brilliancy. Wherever the scenes are not merely conventional they are full of vigour: the journey of the Honourable Edgar and Sol Chickerel, builder, together into Wessex, each determined to prevent a *mésalliance*, the one of a noble brother to a beautiful low-born adventuress, the other of a beloved, if remotely understood, sister, to an old rakish

## THOMAS HARDY

Scrat, candidly uncivil fellow-travellers, compelled by desperate necessity to act together even to the joint frying of bacon in their forced stopping-place, is one of the finest bits of narrative in all the stories.

Then came a book which gathered up the undertones of much of Mr. Hardy's previous work. But in 'The Return of the Native' they are no longer undertones, but swelled, concentrated, and urged into burning, tense, and reverberating expression. They are never long absent from the later work, but their fullest articulation is in this book that misses just criticism and nice valuation by its tremendous appeal to sympathies which are either knit in with the very fibres of life, or remote, or non-existent. (It is a tragedy of temperaments ; it is likewise one in which Nature and man have that rare but always fateful meeting where they wholly blend or endlessly struggle.) Sea and moorland are the everlasting plains where such meetings take place, where Nature aggressively pits

herself against man, or receives his fullest allegiance ; and never have the battle and the blending been more hauntingly pictured than in this story of Egdon Heath. The great struggle of Lear on the same wild land is more of an incident in another kind of tragedy. Here the heath has a personality, a temperament, far more forcible than any of its dwellers ; it is a brooding, pervasive presence acting on them always, stinging them to revolt, encircling and hushing them. One forgets willingly enough the incidents of the story, to remember it only as the expression of the dark, resisting, untameable mood of nature, set to a human tune.

Society has been left far behind, which never means with Mr. Hardy—or any one else not tainted with literary west-end provincialism—the absence in the characters of complex human motives. Outer and inner experiences are by no means always coextensive. One of the principal actors is a son of the soil, who has left Paris and worldly

success to find something better to do than selling trinkets in a suffering world, and who comes back to the heath to find his work, which he does, first in furze-cutting, and eventually in preaching. (The other is an exotic, perfervid woman, craving the light and glitter of the outer world, with an original brain and a mean soul, made tragic by her terribly alien circumstances.) They are not ordinary characters, but they are as likely to be found on a heath as elsewhere, and when they are, a tragedy is in the making. 'The Return of the Native' is the old tale of the new, the slight, the vulgar, struggling against the old, the strong, the real ; of passion warring, now against passion and now against thought ; of ambition and idealism in their ever futile striving.) Round about like wild-flowers growing in blithe confidence on the edge of a roaring torrent, are the quaint humours, the unthinking repose, of Grandfer Cattle, of Christian, and the mummers. It is a book of striking incidents and

powerful dramatic situations, but it is easy to find blemishes and incongruities in it. 'Wuthering Heights,' though it outrages human probabilities far more in its characters, has, in the simplicity and boldness of its construction, a great advantage over this kindred book. Both are poems rather than novels; but 'The Return of the Native' has the ambition to be completely a novel, too, and the narrative is not always on a level with the spirit enwrapping it—a spirit that were more fittingly set to a wild metre and music. The youthful mood of the world was reflected in 'Under the Greenwood Tree'; ('The Return of the Native' reflects, not the aged, perhaps, which may be less sensitive and gentler, but rather maturity, with its emotions at their strongest, and its eyes at their full courage, looking unshrinkingly on the struggle at its darkest and bitterest.) Mr. Hardy has written cleverer novels, and novels where the ills of life have had more pathetic expression. But by its poetic force and its

conquering spirit over those whom it touches at all, it contains the finest of his work.

In 'The Trumpet Major' you descend to a cooler air. Tragedy keeps off, or you see but a gentle shadow of it as John vanishes into the darkness, a smile on his lips and a tear in his eye for sweet Anne Garland. Virtue, in the shape of as fine a hero of chivalry as ever sat at the Table Round, is not rewarded; but that is too much of a commonplace to make a moan over, and the tone of the story is as clear and ringing as the notes from John's own trumpet. Love is still the lord of all, and a most arbitrary, inconsequent lord, too, with whom it's no use arguing, to whom it's no use showing certificates of character, or records of service. And really, when he favours Bob Loveday, who has a word to say against him? That half-suppressed fun and that rare humour of the eyes that Mr. Hardy reveals every now and again, with lapses into grimness, from 'Under the

Greenwood Tree' to 'A Few Crusted Characters,' play round every scene and character in this book, in a kindly mocking commentary, in satire without a sting.

In this, as in the shorter stories where another age is pictured, there is no insistence on detail by way of proving historical acquaintance with the epoch; but the stirring days when Boney was nightly expected to land his army on our coast in flat-bottomed boats, and rustics drilled with pikes and hurdle-sticks and cabbage-stumps on the Downs, are present to our eyes and ears. Unintentionally, and therefore the more vividly, it is an unforgettable page in history. Of all the groups in the novels, the mill folks, the kindly miller, the inconsequent Mrs. Garland, maidy Anne, John and Bob, are those we are on most familiar terms with. They are our veritable neighbours; we have none in our street or parish we know better.

'The Trumpet Major' is the tersest of the

longer stories, the fullest of nervous vigour, the most literary. The reviewer Knight in 'A Pair of Blue Eyes,' says: 'It requires a 'talented omission of your real thoughts to 'make a novel popular.' Whether that be so or not, it requires some such omission to make a novel a perfect work of art, in the narrower sense of the term. A novelist in a personal mood, confessing himself to the world, or evangelising it, may be fulfilling the greatest in him; but full revelation of emotion and opinion tends to diffuseness, and to the ups and downs of style and arrangement coincident with the swell and the exhaustion of the emotions expressed. It is not, therefore, in 'Tess' that Mr. Hardy shows himself most of a practised and perfect craftsman, but in the stories revealing fewer layers of his mind, and made of material to be more coolly dealt with, in 'Under the Greenwood Tree,' in some of the shorter stories, and especially in 'The Trumpet Major.'



If Mr. Hardy's progress were to be traced weather-chartwise, here would occur a great depression. The next two novels are inferior to the rest of his work, and one of them only in a passage or two recalls the writer's real powers. Dulness is the last quality to be associated with Mr. Hardy; but 'A Laodicean' is dull. It begins excellently, and the episode of the baptism in the Methodist chapel, where the courage of the lady of the manor is not equal to the strain put upon it by devotion to her pious father's memory, is piquant and full of promise. But Paula, the least charming of all the vacillating heroines, is forcible enough to give tone to the book; and the central fact about her being her sense of the precariousness of her social position as *parvenue* lady of the manor, the tone is one of extreme rigidity. As worldly as Ethelberta, she has none of Ethelberta's fire and dash, nor the excuse of her desperate fortunes. A Wessex and a society novel, it has the excellencies

of neither. The tortuous love-story is not very interesting; De Stancy is an unwholesome bore; the constant click of the excitable telegraph and the chase of the lovers, all at cross purposes, across the Continent, grow wearisome. Yet there is good and close work in it: indeed, it has the appearance of having been written in an industrious fit of unowned exhaustion. And it could not be Mr. Hardy's without being redeemed in some way from mere commonplace. It has an interesting side, this 'Story of To-day.' The substitution of modern energy and brains, expressed in money, for the old feudal prestige, is the idea at the bottom of it. Brains and wealth have conquered. The engineer takes possession of the De Stancy castle and lands, and bequeathes them to his daughter. Not only is there a De Stancy ready to love her with a fierce devotion and to give her the only thing she lacks; but the very castle has a personality. It saps her modern faith, and

rouses longings in her for that old romance that money cannot buy. His own castle walls, no longer his, fight on De Stancy's side: the De Stancy ghosts are the real rivals in her heart to Somerset's claims. Indeed, so strong is this that the walls have to be burnt to the ground before you are fully assured of her loyalty to the architect hero. The castle is the most interesting character in the book.

Not much above 'A Laodicean' in general excellence, and of slighter build, 'Two on a Tower' has at least a charm which the other lacks. The situation is somewhat morbidly unreal, but it provides a few excellent situations. Besides, the characters—they are few—draw out one's sympathies more than do the frigid ones of the preceding book. Lady Constantine and Swithin are not rustics, but their isolation and peculiar temperaments have stripped them of conventionality. The lonely woman suffering from neglect and the cruel re-

strictions forced on her life, feeding on her own heart till she falls in love with the much younger Swithin, whose emotions are of the most rudimentary kind, and whose intellectual interests are of the most absorbing, is the victim of one of those ironical situations in which life delights, according to the observation of Mr. Hardy. The plot is ingenious: the personages are extricated from, or entangled in, the situations of difficulty with fine skill; and if the book is, on the whole, thin and disappointing, and if there are few or no great passages, there is, at least, Swithin. Never has science, notoriously the most disinterested of human pursuits, been so attractively personified as in the beautiful young astronomer. Rarely has its cool, clear temper, its truthful spirit, and its limitations of sympathy, had a keener-sighted presentment.

The line of progress which had run down, now shoots up again with rapid decision in the novel published four years later than

‘Two on a Tower,’ ‘The Mayor of Casterbridge.’ With less of terse vigour than ‘The Trumpet Major,’ and one or two characters, Lucetta and Farfrae, shaky in their reality, it is yet strong in human interest, dramatic in its incidents, and in the rise and progress of its action. No unreality clings round the Mayor, who is as living to us as if we had been browbeaten by him, or been the recipients of his large capricious favours. In this story of ‘the life and death of a man of character,’ the central figure dwarfs, with intention, the rest of the personages, and to some extent the events, not from any inhabitual slightness of the incidents, or from weakness in the characters in general. Henchard was made by nature to be the principal feature and obstacle in his own and his neighbour’s views, and his biographer expresses the fact. He plays the overmastering part, tempered by human fragility and instability, that the heath does in ‘The Return of the Native’ and the

woods in 'The Woodlanders,' a part that Mr. Hardy rarely assigns to his human personages. His personality so affects the course and complexion of the story as to make its construction worth the closest examination. His contradictory emotions, his savagery and sentiment, each have their harmonic counterparts in the incidents: the lurid ones, like the selling of the wife at Weydon Priors and the skimmity-ride, standing out strong against the lonely death of the Mayor, and the (quiet walk and conduct of the still-natured Elizabeth-Jane.)

'The Woodlanders' must be placed just after Mr. Hardy's greater novels, 'Far from the Madding Crowd,' 'The Return of the Native,' 'The Trumpet Major,' 'The Mayor of Casterbridge,' and 'Tess.' In all his best work there is something recognisable beyond the story, a poetic idea or intention of which the narrative serves as illustration and commentary. The idea or intention never fails in greatness, but sometimes

the illustration halts, and this is truer of 'The Woodlanders' than of 'The Return of the Native.' For its description of country life, and for its central conception—which may be interpreted as the effect of the woodlands on their own children, refining by their isolation and beauty Giles and Marty, and on aliens, driving Felice to revolt and selfish passion—the book deserves a high place. But Grace's story comes as a weaker note. There is something in her earlier character, at least, that does not answer to Mr. Hardy's touch. He is in fuller sympathy with less conventional, more passionate, more vivacious natures. The taint of fineladyism is about her and her story: and gentle satire would have been the most effective treatment for her troubles, arising out of the differences between her home-surroundings and her education. Such little difficulties, made so much of in life, give a novelist his chance of teaching a sense of proportion. Fitzpiers, too, is not one of his

author's happy presentations of intellectual men. He talks more insufferably than he acts. The quiet of the woods rouses despair and revolt in Felice: it only breeds conceit in the doctor. In spite of weaknesses, the book claims our sympathies strongly in other directions, and many of its descriptive passages, Midsummer Eve in the woods, for instance, Sherton in the cider season, the barking of the trees, the view from Rubdon Hill over the blue apple valley, are of a kind to cling to the memory as do only a few of the scenes that have met our bodily eyes.

'Tess' has been pushed to the front because of the problems it deals with, but perhaps the place assigned to it is the right one, for, judged by the strength of its appeal to human sympathies, it is doubtless his greatest book. 'Sent out in all sincerity 'of purpose,' its author said of it in his first preface, but sincerity seems hardly to express the intense and burning earnestness with which his championship of Tess is filled.



This very earnestness has shaken his hand now and again, and prevented an idyll of singular beauty, a tragedy of force enough to drive complacency out of the smuggest, from being a complete artistic success. Its greatness is proved by its lovers mostly forgetting its defects in their memory of the whole. Only in summoning a judicial mood do they call to mind that there are improbabilities in the story—and Angel's proposal to Izz to go with him to Brazil is not a slight one; why, if he wished to 'rule his future domesticities himself, instead of kissing the pedagogic rod of convention,' didn't he go and fetch Tess? Then the drivelling John Durbeyfield drivels a little too much, and Tess and Angel talk too big. Very likely a definitive edition of the book is wanted. It may be a matter of question whether the murder, or the madness its cause, or the hanging its consequence, be strictly necessary. It is a book that holds both cheeks ready for the smiting of the little critic, as

do not a few of the great books of the world, till tradition has raised a fence of reverence about them, and they become fetishes. But, in no carping mood, one must own that, apart from the central figure, it is poorer than any of the other great novels in strong presentations of character, as it is richer, or, at least subtler, in its interpretation of Nature.

Mr. Hardy meant the book to be a battleground, and it has been so. Had he merely appealed to sentiment, omitted the violent acts of the end, and made claims for Tess's loveableness, not for her virtue, he might have carried all his readers with him. Many would have been tender-hearted enough to be sorry for Tess, who treat her author's insistence on her purity either as an outrage or a quibble. He preferred to make war. The omission of the murder and its consequences would have left the problem stated, certainly, of the woman undergoing her undue share of suffering ; but Mr. Hardy does not feel his business stop at the state-

ment of problems. He gives their working-out in individual lives. (First he shows Tess as grievously wronged, and then how such wrong may be, by the meekest natures, thrown back with awful violence in the world's face, a fact worth exemplifying at the cost of readers' feelings.)

The chief cause of offence besides the sub-title 'A Pure Woman,' or rather because of the sub-title, is Tess's return to D'Urberville. It has been said to be improbable. It has also been said to prove her impurity. Surely here Mr. Hardy was pointing to one of the great facts of life which ethics are bound to face, a fact neither moral nor immoral, (that the human will has limits of vitality, which means limits of resistance, that, only let the struggle be terrible enough for any individual, he will give in. The power of resistance varies infinitely in weak and strong, but so does the strength of the attack; and a sensitive nature has less chance of victory than a stolid one.) The

surrender—in the virtuous chiefly physical—may mean, in fortunate cases, death, but it may mean, unless suicide be resorted to, a continuance of exhausted life, in which circumstances easily win. And saints are subject in like manner, if not in like degree, as sinners, to this law of human limitation, which is as inevitable as the coming on of old age, and has its examples beyond what are known as the temptations of life. Every man who has given up, for weariness, the ideals of his youth, has experienced this mastery of the spirit by the weakness of the body. The surrender took place, it is said, because Tess was pagan, and so the miracle could not happen. But does the miracle give more than the utmost of one's own strength sublimated by imagination or faith? Fatigue is not a condonation lightly to be put forward for weakness, but it is a cogent plea in that final court of appeal to which only the great suits and struggles of life are carried. (Tess presents the type of woman for generations dear to her con-

demners, ready to merge her whole being in another's, in perfect devotion and trust. The other miserably failed her. Angel's shoddy idealism stuck at one fact, and ignored all the rest of his knowledge of her. There was nothing else in life, and the brothers and sisters prevented death from being an alternative : her domestic affections combined with exhaustion and completed the surrender, such as it was. Then Angel came back—proof she had been lied to. The world returned, but with it the streak of madness in her blood awoke, and she had revenge on what had cursed her life.)

Condonation or explanation of this kind does not mean the substitution of an easier code. Mr. Hardy has, inferentially, adopted a harder one and a higher one than the world is likely to reach for some time, namely, that the measure of purity, and of the reverse, is in the heart's intentions and desires. (His thesis is that Tess's desires were pure : so, therefore, was she.) In estimating the morality of his point of view, it may not be

unhelpful to read, by way of contrast, the words of a reviewer in a well-considered organ of literary opinion. 'Angel Clare is a good man, just and not unduly severe. It is natural that he should discard his wife, not unnatural, considering her sensual attractions, that he should come back to her, and not notice the lemon-coloured finery.' Even his hardest critics—save only this one—will recognise here a depth to which he has not sunk.

Whether he has proved his case or not, (he has, with more courage and chivalry than any other, thrown down his glove in defence of the woman who, be she good or bad, in the particular catastrophe, always pays the whole penalty of suffering and disgrace. He has tilted hard against conventions and the timid silences, and he has made himself be listened to. It is not pity he asks for Tess. Philanthropy has long pitied her. He would draw her 'poor wounded name' from obloquy, and raise her to the level where the innocence of her intentions gives her a

right to dwell. But if he claims justice rather than pity, he bestows pity on her abundantly himself, and on Tess, more than on any other of his creations, has he poured out his humanity.)

A word as to the shorter stories, dealt with elsewhere. 'Wessex Tales,' a collection of five, contributed to various periodicals from 1879 to 1888, and published in the latter year, includes some work at his best level, 'The Three Strangers,' since successfully dramatised, 'The Distracted Preacher,' and 'The Withered Arm.' The two others, 'Interlopers at the Knap' and 'Fellow Townsmen,' in greyer tones and minor key, contain some subtle reading of motive and character. 'A Group of Noble Dames,' published in 1891, is a collection of piquant stories made out of some family legends of his county. A storm-bound Field and Antiquarian Club, being unable to visit, as they had planned, the antiquities of the neighbourhood, the local historian tells the tale of 'The First Countess of Wessex,'

as a substitute for ‘the regulation papers on  
‘ deformed butterflies, fossil ox-horns, pre-  
‘ historic dung-mixens, and such like, that  
‘ usually occupied the more serious attention  
‘ of the members.’ His example is followed,  
and the comments of the members contribute not a little to the abundant humour which is a feature of the stories, notwithstanding the fact that only two out of the ten can be classed as comedy. The conversational style in which they are told keeps the atmosphere cool, and gives opportunity for that light mocking tone which Mr. Hardy can adopt with much skill when he would show the humour of serious situations, and which, being neither bitter nor hilarious, has no incongruity in tales of sadness. ‘Life’s Little Ironies’—published in March 1894—consists of stories contributed to magazines from 1882 to 1893. ‘A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four’ which is hardly an ‘Irony,’ and the bubbling fun of ‘A Few Crusted Characters,’ the second part of the book, mitigate the gloom of the

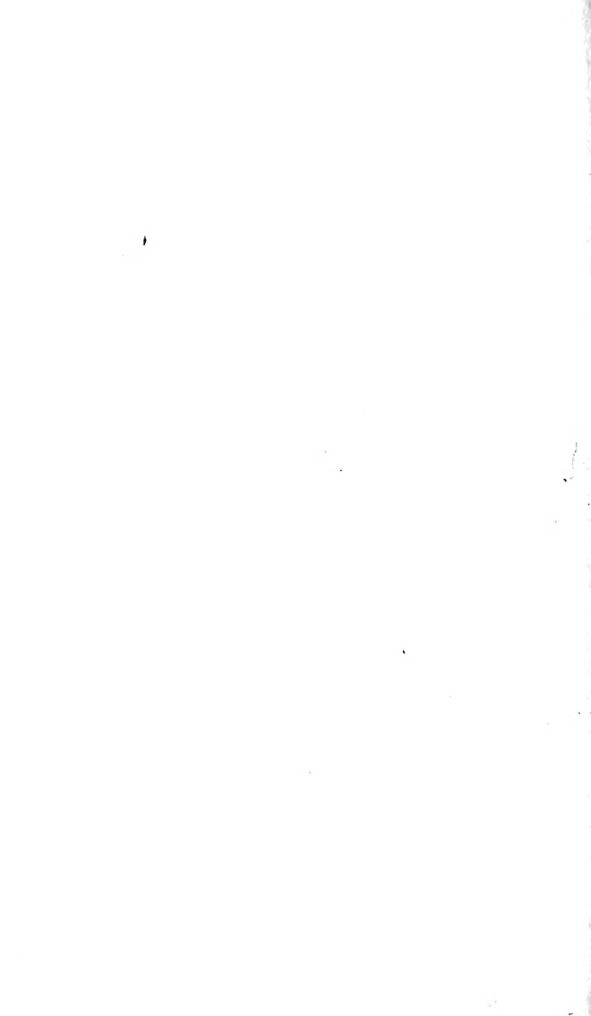


rest, which is of every complexion of sorrow, 'The Son's Veto,' and 'For Conscience Sake' being of the subdued order of 'Fellow Townsmen,' while 'A Tragedy of Two Ambitions' and 'To Please his Wife' have more of unrestrained bitterness about them. 'On the Western Circuit' and 'The Fiddler of the Reels,' two powerful studies of morbid mental and moral conditions, have been followed by another in the same strain, 'An Imaginative Woman,' not yet included in a volume.

Since 'The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved: A Sketch of a Temperament,' which appeared as a serial in *The Illustrated London News* in 1892, has not yet been published in book form, perhaps we may hope the ending given to the story is not the inevitable one. The weary Jocelyn, tossed to and fro all his life by his homeless emotions, might surely at last find the rest he sought beneath the waves, and not be picked up only to meet a ghastly reminder of one of his many failures to

realise his dream. The fickle hero, a sculptor, is constancy itself to one never-fading vision in his mind. In his search for its realisation he loves here, there, and everywhere, but the vision flees at the approach of the earthly beloved, and he will make no compromise. Late in life he finds his ideal bound fast in the grandchild of one of his early temporary loves; but his tardy faithfulness is unrewarded, for his young wife, his beloved, has her own vision, which is not a picture of himself. His conduct in the circumstances is of a generosity the law would frown on. 'The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved' is full of Mr. Hardy's peculiar sympathy with complexities of the soul, and his pity is not ill-spent on the hero, who was no professional breaker of hearts. The roll of his loves has yet something of the comic about it: a shorter one had amply served as manifestation of his temperament. But the ugliness that might lurk in such a story is killed by the conviction forced on us of the reality of Jocelyn's ideal.

STORYWRIGHT



## IV

### STORYWRIGHT

OF all Mr. Hardy's gifts, that of making pictures occurs most readily to one's mind at the mention of his name, though in the conception of some characters, and in the ideas at the back of some stories, he has revealed a higher imaginative power. His invention of incidents—both those of the character-revealing order and those that flash on the vision, delights of colour and grouping, complete in themselves—is of the readiest and the most inexhaustible. Nearly all his situations give the idea of actually having been seen rather than having been thought out by their inventor; our sight of

them is the more vivid. This special talent generally urges its possessor to writing novels of the heroic sword-and-cloak order, but Mr. Hardy has used it mostly for lighting up the life of modern days. His colouring is bold, his detail precise, and grouped with conscious art; his high lights are emphasised. It is through this emphasis, by which he sometimes attacks rather than persuades the eyes, that he now and again goes wrong. The commonplace in incident has not often satisfied him; he loves to drag his personages into bizarre situations, where they grow desperate or light-headed, where circumstances stand to them in strong contrast, mark their isolation, prove their weakness or their strength. In the sequestered vale of Wessex life it is as often the struggles and catastrophes he has presented as the even tenor of rustic ways.

His plans of structure in his stories are various, but a plan there always is; there are no stray disjointed sketches. 'Under

the Greenwood Tree,' 'The Trumpet Major, and 'The Woodlanders' are not built on a dramatic plan, but they have complete pictorial unity. In 'Desperate Remedies,' and 'Far from the Madding Crowd,' of much more elaborate mechanism, the separate parts fit in with rare precision. (The three tragedies, 'The Mayor of Casterbridge,' 'The Return of the Native,' and 'Tess' are of the traditional five act build.) It would be easy to divide the first into the stages of a regular drama: Act I.—The sale of the wife at Weydon Priors Fair, Henchard's remorse and his vow. Act II.—The prosperity consequent on his keeping the vow, and on his strenuous ambitions and endeavours, eccentricity and weakness, nevertheless, creeping in and paving the way for his troubles in Act III., where Farfrae outrivals him in love and business, the rivalry provoking the worst in the mayor's character, and bringing on the days of adversity and degradation in Act IV. There, having drunk misery to the

lees, the good in him comes to the surface under the companionship of that still soul Elizabeth-Jane, his chastened happiness, nevertheless, preparing the further wretchedness in the last act, when Newson returns to steal her affections from him, and when, bereft of love and hope and fortune, he shoulders his workman's tools again, wanders in a circle round and round the spot where his heart still lives, till, wearied out, he lies down in his old servant's hut in Egdon to die.

But Mr. Hardy's chief narrative talent does not lie in the integral structure of his stories; but, as has been said, in his rich invention of incident. A host of others will suggest themselves if but a few of those events be named that test character, or are clad in circumstance dramatically and poetically appropriate. Manston watching the fire where his wife is supposed to have been burnt; the rival lovers, Dick and Shinar, at the honey-taking; Oak's prowess at the sheep-shearing, his lady looking on; the



dulcet piping of his flute to Bathsheba's song, 'the shearers reclining against each other as at suppers in the early ages of the 'world'; the troopers riding into the stream by Overcombe mill, and catching the miller's cherries in their forage-caps; the hangman singing to the listening cottagers, while the condemned man sitting in the chimney-corner joins in the ghastly chorus; Rhoda united again to Farmer Lodge over the strangled body of their son, his wife a stranger standing apart; Henchard's sale of his wife at the fair; the death of Giles in One Chimney Hut—Grace, for whom he died, on one side, and proud to be there, her erring husband on the other, too penitent for his own misdeeds to question her conduct; Joshua clutching Cornelius's arm in the moment of hesitation that sent their worthless father to his death in the weir; Tess baptising her child Sorrow, with the audience of sleepy, awe-struck children about her; the homeless Durbeyfield family

setting up their *ménage* over the vault of their noble ancestors in Kingsbere—a list like this could be multiplied many times; only it could not illustrate the rare genius shown in the revealing and commenting circumstances. This, his strongest faculty as a story-teller, points to the fact further exemplified by his style, that he is a writer not of even perfection but of great passages and great moments. But his moments have occasional power to give the tone to a whole book. One can pick out cases where the incidents are sensational, or too elaborately furnished with picturesque detail, where they overstep the limits of artistic propriety in their determination to besiege the senses and sensibilities. The policemen closing in round Tess at Stonehenge is the type of this offending. But such offences are the defects of a great quality.

In short stories, made up of distinct incidents, as distinguished from sketches, scenes, glimpses and phases of character, Mr. Hardy

is the master, in England, at least. His triumphs in structure are there. It is not only that he has learnt not to be discursive, where order, clearness, deftness, are the first qualities, where fine cut and finish tell more than wealth of material. His scheme, conscious or unconscious, has affected his choice of subject, his style, and his tone. Some of the plots of his shorter tales might, of course, have been elaborated into novels, but a further elaboration does not pressingly suggest itself. As you look, you feel that a small canvas is the more fitting. He has seen that the chief use of short stories is to skim the surface of life, and when he has struck a tragic note in these, he has restrained the expression as far as possible. What is food for light satire or laughter, and incidents that draw a sigh rather than a wail, are the materials he moulds best and most frequently into this form. His style is inseparably knit in with the lightness, aptness, and fine proportions of the structure, and

neither in style nor structure has he reached a higher level of craftsmanship than in 'A Group of Noble Dames.'

Mr. Hardy's invention is more, not less, appreciated, if you know something of how he seeks his plots. Many have doubtless been born in his own brain, and the light that reveals the meaning of the story and gives it life, is from his own imagination; but of Wessex history, as well as Wessex landscape, he has made skilful use. The incidents, memories, and traditions that have given him suggestions, he has probably heard by word of mouth. Legends of Boney's projected invasion, for instance, lie thick about the Wessex Downs, for Lulworth Cove was to be the landing-place, or actually was so, according to 'A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four,' and tales told him as a boy lived vividly in his memory till he made them into 'The Trumpet Major.' But the dry bones of some that he has quickened into life an interested reader can find if he

takes the trouble to forage in county records. The story of Pa'son Billy Toogood's forgetfulness in 'A Few Crusted Characters,' for instance, is a familiar one to Dorset folks, his original being a famous old rector of Frampton, the Rev. William Butler, friend of the Prince Regent, and notorious and untirable fox-hunter.

The incidents in the story of 'Tess' are doubtless in the main purely imaginary. They are built, however, on a structure of suggestive facts, namely, on the history of the famous house of Turberville, and the existence, in large numbers, among the Dorsetshire peasantry at the present day, of the descendants of many noble and powerful feudal houses, since early in the last century great alterations having taken place in the ownership of land. The Turbervilles descend from Sir Pagan or Sir Payne, a follower of the Conqueror, whose name appears in Battle Abbey Roll. About Henry III.'s time they became possessed of the manor of Bere,

where they resided for five hundred years. The site of the old house can still be seen at a farm called The Court, below Woodbury Hill. The county history contains a picture of it. In the Turberville aisle, in the fine old church that stands just above, are the family vaults and the tombs: 'canopied, altar-shaped, and plain; their carvings being defaced and broken; their brasses torn from the matrices, the rivet-holes remaining like marten-holes in a sand-cliff,' is the accurate description in 'Tess,' of the present state of the latter. On the 'beautifully traceried window of many lights' occur the names of numerous Turbervilles, with their arms: Ermine, a lion rampant, crowned gules. Crest, a castle argent—'a ramping lion, and a castle over him,' is Tess's version, her heraldic information being derived from the old silver spoon that stirred the family soup. A younger branch of the once powerful house settled in Wool (Wellbridge) in Elizabeth's time. The present house,

probably rebuilt by Sir John Turberville, Sheriff of Dorset in 1652, is the scene of Tess's confession to Angel. The pictures of the gruesome ladies that frightened Angel with their hideous distortion of his wife's features, can be seen on the staircase still. Out of these facts, then, the debasement of noble names and the strain of noble blood in the Dorsetshire peasantry, superadded to a desire to do battle against an old injustice, and make a chivalrous defence, has sprung the story of 'Tess.'

Again, from a little bit of pedigree that would to most suggest a mere comment, were they to examine its dates, has grown the best of all the stories in the 'Noble Dames.' It tells how Thomas Horner of Mells married Susanna Strangways of Melbury, and that Elizabeth, their daughter, born in 1723, married Stephen Fox (afterwards Lord Ilchester) in 1736, that is, at thirteen. The shocked comment of an ordinary reader is turned into the story of Betty Dornell, first

Countess of Wessex, in which the subtle play of motive, circumstance, and character, owe just nothing at all to the original fact, and yet seem its inevitable outcome. The gruesome tale of 'Barbara of the House of Grebe' has grown out of some family chronicles, vivified beyond recognition by Mr. Hardy's fertile imagination. Chene Manor, Barbara's home, is Canford Magna, which in the middle and till the end of last century was the house of Sir John Webb. His only surviving daughter Barbara married the fifth Earl of Shaftesbury, but whether the character of that nobleman deserved commemoration as Lord Uplandtowers, my dry-as-dust chronicles do not reveal. Barbara's death at Florence, the survival of but one child out of eleven, can be seen in family pedigrees, but of her marriage with Willowes, and all that makes the interest of the ghastly tale, there is not a trace.

The scene of 'Anne, Lady Baxby,' is Sherborne (Sherton) Castle. Held by George,



second Earl of Bristol, and his son, Lord Digby, for the king, it was besieged by Lord Bedford, leader of the Parliamentary forces, and Lady Digby's brother. The clash of family feeling and politics, and the communication between the brother and sister provided a slight framework, but the humour of the tale is Mr. Hardy's own.

The original of the Eighth Dame was Penelope, daughter and heiress of Mary, Countess of Rivers. The three lovers were Sir John Gage of Firle, Sir William Hervey of Ickworth, and Sir George Trenchard of Wolveton. Her threat of displeasure should they quarrel with each other on her account, her playful promise to marry all of them in turn, and her fulfilment of the promise, are authenticated traditions, out of which has sprung the strange and melancholy story.

The only interest of bringing such hard dry facts as these into the country of romance, is in their further illustration of the way in which Mr. Hardy's imagination works.

The method of many a poet and novelist is first to catch a motive for poem or story, which may be a native of anywhere under the sun, and then to clothe it in a garment of home manufacture. Mr. Hardy generally works the contrary way. For some of his characters, but in a much greater degree for his plots, incidents, and scenes, he has dug in the soil he knows best, using the material ready to his hand. The foundation made of this, he has let his imagination play freely about the superstructure, but the material of the base, and the character of the surroundings, have generally reminded him of his obligations to congruity, and kept his imagination in fitting moods. This may seem to be less the case with his personages, but his study of men and women has taught him how subtle a thing is human nature, and how continually it is slipping the bonds of local and racial harness. Wessex, and Mayfair, and the warm South, have each special backgrounds for their dramas, each their own

speech, each their traditions of translating thoughts and motives into action ; but at the back of the several local manifestations, the general human instincts, impulses, and peculiarities, find kindred thousands of leagues apart.



MEN AND WOMEN



## V

### MEN AND WOMEN

OF characters in novels that are characters at all, and not shadows, there are first those we actually live with. Dr. Primrose, Toby Shandy, Dugald Dalgetty, D'Artagnan, Beatrix Esmond, and Jane Eyre, are of the company. Probability has just as much and as little to do with the fact of their existence as it would have in real life. Then there are those whose features, temperaments, attitudes, we remember long, but as we remember the great portraits in a gallery. They have much to tell, only they do not come out of their frames to tell it. Characters they are ; but hardly personages, and

they gain admiration rather than wide acquaintance.

Of Mr. Hardy's creations a number belong certainly to the first class. Dick Dewy, Fancy, Henchard, Bathsheba, Bob Loveday, Tony, Lizzie Newberry, Betty Dornell, and Tess, are all warm with life. They live in a good many people's world already: they would live in a wider world were there more comfortable complacency in the Wessex novels: the lack of it is a real grievance to the ordinary novel reader.

(Mr. Hardy uses the two methods of character presentation, and each with care. His analyses are minute, fine-drawn, and frequent, but they nearly always tally with actions, and if his commentaries are interesting they are never strictly necessary. With his ready invention of incident, he is rarely at a loss for testing and revealing scenes.) Nevertheless, a good many of his personages must be given over to the portrait class, Edward Springrove, for instance, and, in



fact, all the admirably conducted young architect heroes, along with most of the conventional London folks. Elfrida's step-mother, an ambitious attempt, is incoherent. Perhaps one's desire mingles with, and influences, a conviction that Knight and Paula never lived. Tamsin and Lucetta are shadowy ; John Durbeyfield is improbable enough to make one believe him to have been drawn straight from life. Farfrae, though particularly shrewd observation went to his making, is rather an unconventional theory on two legs than a live Scot.

(His greatest successes have lain with subtle characters, and with such as are apt to be readily stirred by the winds of impulse and caprice,) even though one has to put aside Giles, and the Trumpet Major, Marty South, and Oak, to make the generalisation. (The other characteristics, or circumstances of character, that he loves to bring into play, are passion—so much stronger a reality with him than with most English

novelists — powers of fascination, mental gifts—here he treads on dangerous ground, for the greatly endowed in this direction generally prove strutting coxcombs in novels—and rebellion against alien surroundings.)

The comic rustics are his most popularly known characters. There are the simple ones, too unsophisticated to do anything but show their simplicity, and be a perpetual and involuntary comedy; and their neighbours, the witty ones, who have mostly a spice of wickedness about them. The timid man is a stock character, but he is repeated with a difference. Leaf in a kindly innocent way enjoys the social distinction of never having ‘had no head.’ ‘He’s very clever for a silly chap, good—now, sir. You never knowed a young feller ‘keep his smock-frocks so clane,’ is grateful praise to his heart. Poorgrass has the timidity mingled with a good deal of head and vanity, and a dash of malice. “‘Heh—‘ heh! well, I wish to noise nothing abroad

‘—nothing at all!’ murmured Poorgrass, ‘diffidently. “But we are born to things—that’s true. Yet I would rather my trifle were hid; though, perhaps, a high nature is a little high, and at my birth all things were possible to my Maker, and he may have begrudged no gifts. . . . But under your bushel, Joseph! under your bushel with you!”’ Christian Cantle, the ‘man of mournfullest make,’ is more of Leaf’s shape, save that he wants Leaf’s joyous complacency. They are various in gait and utterance when you begin to run over the group that includes Grandfer Cantle, the ‘playward’ old man; the stammering Randle—“‘a can cuss, mem, as well as you or I, but ‘a can’t speak a common speech to save his life”’; Coggan, who, with all respect for the intellect and fervour of Dissenters, hated ‘a feller who’d change his old ‘ancient doctrine for the sake of getting to ‘heaven’; that resourceful sergeant of the Overcombe recruits—“What’s that man

‘ a-saying of in the rear rank ? ’ “ Please, ‘ sir, ’tis Anthony Cripplestraw, wanting to ‘ know how he’s to bite off his katridge, ‘ when he haven’t a tooth left in ’s head ? ” ‘ “ Man ! why, what’s your genius for war ? ‘ Hold it up to your right-hand man’s ‘ mouth, to be sure, and let him nip it off ‘ for ye ” ; ’ the maltster with his grievance against all who should dispute his age or put in claims for the venerableness of others — “ “ Ye be no old man worth naming — ‘ no old man at all. Yer teeth baint half ‘ gone yet ; and what’s a old man’s standing ‘ if so be his teeth baint gone ? . . . ’Tis a ‘ poor thing to be sixty, when there’s people ‘ far past four score—a boast weak as water ” ; ’ and Worm with his depressing formula, “ “ I ‘ be a poor wambling man, and life’s a mere ‘ bubble. ” ’

But Mr. Hardy’s comic rustics, as they are the most generally appreciated of his personages, so also have they been most abused, for their simplicity, but still more

for their wit. The language they, and the other characters, too, use, and the ideas they express, have been called quite impossible for the 'illiterate clods whom he describes.' Here the typical townsman speaks. Mr. Hardy never attempts to describe 'clods,' and illiterateness is compatible not only with mental endowments but with a wide and even an ambitious vocabulary. The Dorset labourer is an articulate person, and he is proverbially aspiring in his language—his very malaprops are a sign of it. Mr. Hardy has claimed for the Wessex peasants kinship with the Warwickshire breed that delighted Shakespeare. Seeing the affinity between those he had himself watched and listened to, and the dramatist's witty clowns and humorous simpletons, he dug in his own soil with the more zest, and brought up native material. But the consciousness of the kinship had doubtless considerable influence on the manner in which he presented them, and

they may speak with more of an Elizabethan Warwickshire accent than strict realism would admit of. The objection raises an important and interesting question in fiction. In the delineation of character and the selection of incident the novelist is free as the poet and dramatist to extract the essence, to sublimate, to arrange. But in the record of conversation a strenuous attempt has been made of late years to force him to bring the phonograph into use, and to demand the actual finite words and not the final sense. The breach or observance of this rule is a favourite test of commonplace critics, for the mimicry of speech and accent, one of the most ordinary of accomplishments, has a knowing air about it. Literalism in such matters is not quite possible: for human speech is often too elliptical, too stammering, to be intelligible without the aid of the intonations, gestures, and expressions which cannot utter themselves in print. But an approximation to it

is, of course, convenient, inasmuch as it enhances the verisimilitude of the scene and dialogue to literal readers ; and in depicting the more superficial or the more commonplace events of life it is an appropriate method. However, the rule of transcribing literally Mr. Hardy has never attempted to keep. Half his offence—if offence it be—is not due to unskilful reporting, but to his deliberately using a poetical rather than a phonographic method. He has defended himself on the point of his lack of literalness in the transcription of dialect forms, by declaring such literalness ‘disturbs the proper balance of a true representation by unduly insisting upon the grotesque element ; thus directing attention to a point of inferior interest, and diverting it from the speaker’s meaning, which is by far the chief concern where the aim is to depict the men and their natures rather than their dialect forms.’<sup>1</sup> These words are applicable here, if we widen ‘dialect forms’

<sup>1</sup> *Athenæum*, Nov. 30, 1878.

to include all that concerns the speech and powers of expression of the Dorset peasants. The meaning to be conveyed is that the peasants are all unlearned in town ways, yet quick-witted, humorous, full of grotesque and unexpected ideas, with a fine language on their lips, got partly from the Bible, perhaps, and partly from their fathers' bequests of an older tongue. But listening to them, a stranger could hardly pierce their speech enough to find all this out ; so Mr. Hardy, knowing them, and estimating his readers' capacities and limitations, attempts a translation of the spirit instead of abiding by the letter. He is not consistent in this of course ; some of the wit and happy blundering have come straight from life, doubtless ; and his translation may now and again end in not very fine-pointed caricature. Yet in his main method he exercises a right that fiction can least of all dispense with now that its purposes are growing more and more enlarged. Only,



after asserting this right, it strikes one as a little absurd to give Coggan and Poorgrass, and Penny and Spinks, the reception of argument : better, surely, first to be grateful for the fun they afford to a dull world, and then to go and learn firsthand something of country minds and manners.

Besides the comic characters, there are others, strongly marked, finely shaded, representing the dignity, the intelligence, and the sturdiness of rustic life. Of these are Tranter Dewy, the kindly cynic, the genial and affectionate Miller Loveday, the elder Springrove, the 'poet with a rough skin,' Oak, type of the patient love 'which many 'waters cannot quench, nor the floods 'drown,' the pure-natured Winterborne, friend of all that grew in the woods, and the trusty and resourceful reddleman.

Mr. Hardy's villains are mostly of one type, hot-blooded and wild-blooded, their senses the strongest thing in their nature. But the only sensualist, pure and simple, is

D'Urberville ; the others have some mental endowment, or special personal charm to aid them in their fascination, if not as a saving grace. Manston is a man of parts ; he has not run all to brutality. Troy's romance is tawdry sentimentalism, but his fascination of bodily skill, impudent talk and assurance, is real enough. Wildeve has grace of movement, delicacy of manner, and sometimes of perception. Even Festus Derriman, braggart and buffoon, has his vanity stirred by a lively imagination. There is an attractive air of magnificence and romance about him, till he is found out. Fitzpiers, too, also on the borders of villaindom, is carried away as much by intellectual temptations as by sensual, and the fineness of some of his fibres he shows in his fair and generous-minded bargain with Grace. They are mainly, in short, types of the temptations of quick-natured and warm-natured men. Dare stands apart from these, a cold-blooded imp, ready for any meanness or trickery,

and nearer him perhaps is Mop Ollamoor, for he is too irresponsible to be grouped with the passionate ones, this 'deil that 'came fiddlin' thro' the toun,' and bound the hysterical spirit of Car'line in dancing captivity.

Mr. Barrie tells that in a library copy of one of the 'Wessex Novels' was found written in a lady's handwriting, 'Oh, how I *hate* Thomas Hardy!' Every woman will go straight to the point where the novelist has offended this sensitive and emphatic reader, whether she shares the sentiment or not. (The offence is that Bathsheba, Fancy, Elfride, and sweet Anne Garland are fickle and wayward, they play the fool and put themselves in the wrong over and over again, and are totally wanting in that statuesque and goddess-like dignity that women naturally wish to have regarded as the characteristic garment of their sex. But more than that, and worse: these frail, uncertain creatures are fascinating;) there is no doubt about it, each of them

‘Light and humorous in her toying,  
Oft building hopes, and soon destroying,  
Long, but sweet in the enjoying.’

(They play havoc with readers’ hearts, and cause confusion in ideals. And it is so bad for the world to be confirmed in its already too strong opinion that attractiveness and loveableness are hardly things of the proprieties or the superficial moralities. Not that caprice, by the way, is a peculiarly feminine quality in Mr. Hardy’s eyes. Bob Loveday and the Mayor have it as strongly as any of the women. It is one of the fascinations of human character for him. ‘Perhaps there was a proneness to inconstancy in her nature,’ he says of Elfride, ‘a nature to those who contemplate it from a standpoint beyond the influence of that inconstancy the most exquisite of all in its plasticity and ready sympathies.’ In Jocelyn Pearston fickleness is an actual malady.

A critic recently advised him to try his

hand at the modern woman. May he find strength to resist the suggestion if she be the thing so named in recent novels! Indeed, what is more likely to be the real thing, judging from manifestations in the world rather than in fiction—an inchoate mass of contrary tendencies, at an ungraceful stage of growth, but only unwholesome because unmade—is a ticklish thing for art. I do not think modernness, save in superficial accent, is lacking in the group that includes Ethelberta, Ella Marchill, Lizzie Newberry, and Eustacia. And persons and things styled ‘modern’ are always merely conspicuous symptoms of tendencies which, if they be real, may in time absorb or live alongside, but never altogether efface, the things and types of old growth. Bathsheba is not of yesterday only, or to-day. Our grandchildren will know her, sigh over the frailty of womenkind, and love her always.

Mr. Hardy has not missed the opportunity given him by his studies in human nature of

Joining in that fascinating amusement, the making of generalisations on womenkind. The usual way of playing the game is to begin by taking for granted that woman is a profound and rather unholy mystery. Then by a sleight of hand of incredible quickness, and an assurance in the voice and eyes which is more than half the trick, the conjuror turns up a queen and a knave as final solution, proves that he is a very clever fellow, that there was no mystery after all, and that the whole truth about womenkind can be summed up in a couple of epigrams. Then the game begins all over again, but always at the mystery. Mr. Hardy does not play this way exactly, but he makes frequent generalisations of which an interesting collection could be made out of the earlier books. As generalisations are always too sweeping, he has honestly bought greater scientific accuracy at the price of an occasional self-contradiction. And he has not dramatised or personified his generalisations.

(1) His women are strongly individual. His attitude towards them has always been that of an indulgent critic, keen-sighted for failings, and just: he has neither idealised nor flattered them, but he has broken a lance not seldom for their freedom from the conventions that stunt and warp them. His women of strong passions are portrayed with special vividness.) Miss Aldclyffe is an exasperating companion: in her ravenous hunger for affection from Cytherea there is neither charm nor comfort; but she has yet a power stronger than most young and graceful heroines to stir one's sympathies. (Eustacia, the 'raw material of a goddess,' her 'Pagan eyes full of nocturnal mysteries,' who 'had mentally walked round love, told 'the towers thereof, considered its palaces, 'and concluded that love was but a doleful 'joy,' who yet 'desired it, as one in a desert 'would be thankful for brackish water,' beating her heart out against her Egdon prison, has that compelling force to win

sympathy from different temperaments that marks the woman made for tragedy.) Felice, too, though less convincing, draws us against ourselves, as she utters her terrible consciousness of the quiet that enwraps her—‘I lay  
‘awake all last night, and I could hear the  
‘scrape of snails creeping up the window  
‘glass.’ With that one-sided remembrance we have of vivid natures we seem always to see her with that ‘sort of sorrow on her face  
‘as if she chid her own soul.’ (Poor Tess is different from these. They are rebels by nature, who would exhaust their passions at an extravagant rate, and live and die with hungry hearts. Tess has the warm overflowing affection that seeks an unchanging investment in domestic life. Her madness is an accident as unforeseeable as her betrayal.) Picotee, whose lines fall in happier, more sheltered circumstances, and who has a less dangerous inheritance, is her own sister. (Some there are in whom desires and passions have been starved. Elizabeth-Jane



is one, that quiet-stepping but strong-natured girl, with her 'field-mouse fear of the coulter 'of destiny, a legacy from her early years of 'misery.' Another is Marty, one of the subtlest and most striking of Mr. Hardy's or anyone else's country girls. Bred in poverty, to constant work, and to more than usual solitude, she has yet that keen interest in other folks, and that bright mind that might have meant wit and brilliancy in different circumstances. Ignorant and uncouth and with a spice of mischief in her, the interest takes grotesque forms, as in the case of her interference on Grace's behalf in her letter to Fitzpiers, and her chalked-up rhyme on Giles's door. These are bye-plays in the working of her pure and steadfast nature, and in the history of her long, unregarded, unrewarded love.

One cannot summarise all the types here, but a few pictures, chosen at random from the scenes where women play a part, will present women's nature from no narrow point

of view. Let us take Bathsheba the ‘shapely maid,’ wiling the time away on the top of the waggon of furniture by surveying herself in the mirror: Eustacia seeking for emancipation from the gloomy heath at the hands of Clym, its product and lover; Tess happy in the return of the unconscious affection of Angel as he bears her in his sleep to Bindon, and end with Marty at the grave of Giles—  
‘As this solitary and silent girl stood there  
‘in the moonlight, a straight slim figure,  
‘clothed in a plaitless gown, the contours of  
‘womanhood so undeveloped as to be  
‘scarcely perceptible, the marks of poverty  
‘and toil effaced by the misty hour, she  
‘touched sublimity at points, and looked  
‘almost like a being who had rejected with  
‘indifference the attribute of sex for the  
‘loftier quality of abstract humanism. . . .

“Now, my own, own love,” she whispered,  
“You are mine, and on’y mine; for she has  
‘forgot ’ee at last, although for her you  
‘died. But I—whenever I get up I’ll think

‘ of ’ee, and whenever I lie down I ’ll think  
 ‘ of ’ee. Whenever I plant the young larches  
 ‘ I ’ll think that none can plant as you  
 ‘ planted ; and whenever I split a gad, and  
 ‘ whenever I turn the cider wring, I ’ll say  
 ‘ none could do it like you. If ever I forget  
 ‘ your name let me forget home and heaven !  
 ‘ . . . But no, no, my love, I never can for-  
 ‘ get ’ee ; for you was a good man, and did  
 ‘ good things ! ” ’

[(Not in the case of maidens only has youth  
 a charm in Mr. Hardy’s hands.) His boys  
 have not that heroic mien they would doubt-  
 less desire to appear with, for he has a  
 humiliating way of stripping off the outer  
 garment of dignity. Indeed, it might be  
 said, whom he loves he laughs at. But they  
 have the grace that makes them attractive  
 in their elders’ eyes. His prime favourites  
 among them, and ours—they are three, Dick  
 Dewy, Bob Loveday, and the never enough  
 appreciated young astronomer, Swithin—have  
 one charm more than the flighty heroines, in

that they lack the streak of worldliness hardly ever absent from his women, especially his women of fascination. Swithin is poorly supported, and the tower is not so good a background as the greenwood tree or the open downs; but about his clear crystal nature, his quick response to calls from the remote heavens, and his aloofness from ordinary human things, till he is forced into love by the persistence of a woman older than himself, there is a radiance of youth and grace and the ideal. Dick, however, is the prince of charmers. He may present the card of Dewy and Son, Tranters and Hauliers, as proof of his dignity, and lay in a goodly stock of chairs and tables and victuals and drink for his housekeeping; nevertheless, whenever we think of him it is as he pens the desperate letter, which left it doubtful 'whether he there and then left off 'loving Miss Fancy Day; whether he had 'never loved her seriously, and never meant 'to; whether he had been dying up to the

‘ present moment, and now intended to get  
‘ well again ; or whether he had hitherto been  
‘ in good health, and intended to die for her  
‘ forthwith’ ; or, as he gives a juvenile hop  
with one foot to put himself in step with the  
parson, previous to telling him of his matri-  
monial projects ; or, as he shouts to Enoch  
across the wood, “ D’ye know who I  
‘ be-e-e-e-? . . . Dick Dew-w-w-w-yy ! . . .  
‘ Just a-ma-a-a-a-a-arried ! . . . This is my  
‘ wife, Fa-a-a-a-a-ancy ! ” (holding her up to  
‘ Enoch’s view as if she had been a nosegay) !’  
All unwittingly, he has that charm which  
no knowledge of the world can buy, of guile-  
lessness, trust, and of falling in love to an  
entirely ridiculous extent. As for the  
harum-scarum, fickle Bob, never to be de-  
pended on save for susceptibility, an indiffer-  
ence to being slashed about in his country’s  
cause, and a capacity for being deceived in  
every port, I fear most readers repeat the  
unjust judgment of fate, and elect him over  
the head of the steadfast trumpet-major.

Of the young men of more serious, weightier cast, besides Giles and Gabriel, first, for vitality and interest, come John Loveday, Clym, and Angel Clare, the gentleman, the idealist, and the theorist. Clym Yeobright is, of all types of character, the least rewarding to his inventor, unless he be given a big world to live in. A man of intellect and ideals working in a narrow sphere is apt to appear as a coxcomb and not to be believed in. Clym is believed in, partly because his intellectual capacities are so divorced from ambition, and so singularly wedded to Nature, that life in the narrow world of Egdon seems quite congruous, but also because of a certain intensity of feeling which has been used in his making, as if a bit of his creator had been infused into him, and breathed through him. Angel is of more contradictory tendencies, and less precise effect. While interested lookers on at Tess's tragedy have rushed to vehement and opposite conclusions about him, Mr. Hardy has

left his own judgment in a half light ; has pointed out his limitations, but with a kind of understanding pity for him, and refused to make him the scape-goat to bear the sins of the prejudices of the world. Angel is a skilful embodiment of a type of the modern man in any age, one whose mind has perceived more truth than his soul will ever grasp, whose intelligence has outstripped the capacities of his nature.

Among the older men two gloomy figures stand out, Boldwood and Henchard. Boldwood, the still, deep man, on whom life makes so few and such ineffaceable impressions, is built in a simpler fashion than most of Mr. Hardy's characters. He is no more real than Heathcliff, for all that he is made after a more human pattern ; but his reality is not less. Henchard, that strange barbarian, love, generosity, and the nobler virtues as much stronger in him as jealousy, recklessness, thunderous temper, and caprice are weaker in the smoother, better-drilled

folks around him, is the type of the makers of catastrophes,—broken in for a time to the routine of civilisation, even in the newer paths he ruled, but his natural self was bound to break the bands eventually. His figure stands by itself strongly defined and lonely, not only in Maumbury Ring and on Egdon, but among all Mr. Hardy's other characters, and among those of English fiction.

Among the older men, too, should be remembered Parson Clare, he who 'loved Paul ' of Tarsus, liked St. John, hated St. James ' as much as he dared.' Narrow in opinion, incapable of subtlety, hard in theory, yet with a heart broadened by charity for the sinner, his was a nature that no mental austerity could make other than sweet. He is not treated very dramatically; but the description of him is so vivid and beautiful that one is fain to give him a place in one's memory with the 'poure Persoun of a toun,' and with him of Auburn.



A few classifications, references, and selected portraits, do not cover the ground of Mr. Hardy's success as a character-painter. And in the description of the personages that are not dramatic successes there is always much first-hand observation. On looking back at his folk, merry and sad, gentle and rebel, simple and sophisticated, one's first thought is that they are stimulating company ; the second, that, read by other eyes, many of them might have seemed commonplace enough. Out of the variety which is their chief characteristic is evolved the truth, that emotions and complexities, varied mental and moral features, are not dependent on a highly organised civilisation for their existence, that if the society-mill has a refining, it has also an effacing power.



H U M O U R I S T



## VI

### HUMOURIST

THERE are two widely different grounds on which Mr. Hardy may be considered as a humourist. He has one obvious, even assertive claim to the title, founded on what if it be not humour is naught, and it is convenient to give this claim first attention. The Weatherbury, Mellstock, Egdon, and Overcombe rustics, are mainly the channels through which his more evident humour flows. His attitude towards country life counts for a good deal in its quality; he takes his stand just enough outside to watch with a keen relish the differences between rustic ways and the smoother life of towns,

and just enough inside to miss none of the fine shades, and to mix no contempt with his sense of the ludicrous. This humour is mainly concerned with the surface of life, though it takes occasional dips below. The eccentricities of rustic manners and rustic facial expressions are noted with the relentless momentary truth of a Dutch painter. All the topsy-turvydom of simple minds brought face to face with novel experiences or unfamiliar ideas, asserting their real dignity somewhat unreally by misfitting words and wandering metaphors, are grist to the mill of this lighter humour, which is at its richest in 'Under the Greenwood Tree' and 'Far from the Madding Crowd.' He has given us less of it of late years, though in 'A Few Crusted Characters' there is a revival.

It reaches us by a kind of translation. To live a year in Wessex would mean certain failure in finding Henery, or Spinks, or Poorgrass. To live ten, with ear and understanding capable of being acclimatised, would

probably be to find them living with a numerous kindred. Mr. Hardy has his own way of presenting the local accent of mind and speech and habit, so that when it reaches us it may be essentially, if not literally, true. It is not the only method, but it is a vivid one. Shakespeare uses the same ; to a smaller extent Scott does so also, but he trusts more to literalness. In mentioning Shakespeare I do not allude to certain epigrammatic phrasings, turns of speech, or of events, that have the look of distinct imitation, like the scene in the vault, where the familiar discussion takes place between Worm and Cannister and the elder Smith, on the noble dead in the coffins, or the tranter's description of the varying symptoms of love, or his exposition of ‘ “ how a  
‘ maiden is. She'll swear she's dying for  
‘ thee, and she is dying for thee, and  
‘ she will die for thee ; but she'll fling a look  
‘ over t' other shoulder at another young  
‘ feller, though never leaving off dying for

‘thee just the same,’ or Jiddy’s reflection on how sweet it would be to be able to disdain a suitor’s offer with “No, sir—I’m your ‘better,’” or “kiss my foot, sir ; my face is ‘for mouths of consequence,’” all made after an older generation stage pattern. Apart from what may possibly be an effect of memory, there is an essential likeness. Poor-grass and the Maltster, and Cantle and Leaf, and Matthew Moon, are of the kindred of Bottom, and Launce, and Launcelot Gobbo, and of the clown who was the lover of Mopsa and the dupe of Autolycus. They are clowns, compounds of wit and simplicity, with no clear dividing line between the qualities.

This may be but another way of saying that they are caricatures, but if so, I am not consciously depreciating them. Caricature may, unjustly, bear the reproach of its grosser manifestations, but it is as legitimate a process of art as symbolism, or any other adaptation of literal or spiritual facts for the more striking presentation of some portion



of them. It consists merely in the isolation of certain qualities or contrasts from the softening, behazing atmosphere through which literal eyes behold them, and which is everyday-life's means of spoiling a joke. Not that everyday life always insists on making use of the hazy medium. As caricature and farce must be classed a good part of the humour of the Weatherbury rustics and their fellows. The tales of Tony Kytes and Andrey Satchell, the mission of the Mellstock choir to the Vicar, Cainy Ball's visit to Bath, are all farce, the last very broad farce. But the fun is genuine, the absurdity is essentially true to human nature, and the laugh it raises very genial. To live in the tranter's company is to love country ways ever after. The narrative of Bob Loveday's return, too, is enough to convert a cynic. It is one of the best examples of that mingled geniality and piquancy, where laughing at and with the actors are so skilfully combined, one adding to the effect of the other. But it

is not brief enough for quoting in full, and it will not bear division.

The geniality of country ways he shows occasionally interspersed with disciplinary candour. Mr. Maybold was sensitive under its touch, but did not resent it—‘The  
‘ ancient body of minstrels in the passage  
‘ felt their curiosity surging higher and  
‘ higher as the minutes passed. . . . Yet their  
‘ sense of propriety would probably have re-  
‘ strained them from any attempt to discover  
‘ what was going on in the study, had not the  
‘ Vicar’s pen fallen to the floor. The con-  
‘ viction that the movement of chairs, etc.,  
‘ necessitated by the search, could only have  
‘ been caused by the catastrophe of a bloody  
‘ fight, overpowered all other considerations ;  
‘ and they advanced to the door, which had  
‘ only just fallen to. Thus, when Mr. May-  
‘ bold raised his eyes after the stooping, he  
‘ beheld glaring through the door Mr. Penny  
‘ in full-length portraiture, Mail’s face and  
‘ shoulders above Mr. Penny’s head, Spinks’s  
‘ forehead and eyes over Mail’s crown, and a

‘ fractional part of Bowman’s countenance  
‘ under Spinks’s arm—crescent shaped por-  
‘ tions of other heads and faces being visible  
‘ behind these—the whole dozen and odd  
‘ eyes bristling with eager inquiry.

‘ Mr. Penny, as is the case with excitable  
‘ bootmakers and men, on seeing the Vicar  
‘ look at him, and hearing no word spoken,  
‘ thought it incumbent upon himself to say  
‘ something of any kind. Nothing suggested  
‘ itself till he had looked for about half a  
‘ minute at the Vicar.

‘ “You’ll excuse my naming it, sir,” he  
‘ said, regarding with much commiseration  
‘ the mere surface of the Vicar’s face, “but  
‘ perhaps you don’t know, sir, that your chin  
‘ have bust out a-bleeding where you cut  
‘ yourself a-shaving this morning, sir.” . . .

‘ “Dear me, dear me !” said Mr. Maybold  
‘ hastily, looking very red, and brushing his  
‘ chin with his hand, then taking out his  
‘ handkerchief and wiping the place.

‘ “That’s it, sir ; all right again now, ’a

‘ b’lieve—a mere nothing,” said Mr. Penny.  
‘ “ A little bit of fur off your hat will stop it in  
‘ a minute, if it should bust out again.”

‘ “ I’ll let ye have a bit of fur off mine,”  
‘ said Reuben, to show his good feeling.’

Oak has to bear this candour too, and he does so with his usual good sense. On occasion his own tongue was plain enough.

‘ “ Ay, I can mind yer face now, shepherd,”  
‘ said Henery Fray, criticising Gabriel with  
‘ misty eyes as he entered upon his second  
‘ tune. “ Yes—now I see ye blowing into the  
‘ flute I know ye to be the same man I see  
‘ play at Casterbridge, for yer mouth were  
‘ scrimped up and yer eyes a-staring out like  
‘ a strangled man’s—just as they be now.”

‘ “ ’Tis a pity that playing the flute should  
‘ make a man look such a scarecrow,” observed Mr. Mark Clark, with additional criticism of Gabriel’s countenance, the latter person jerking out, with the ghastly grimace required by the instrument, the chorus of  
‘ “ Dame Durden.’ . . .”

‘ “ I hope you don’t mind that young man  
‘ Mark Clark’s bad manners in naming your  
‘ features? ” whispered Joseph to Gabriel  
‘ privately.

‘ “ Not at all,” said Mr. Oak.

‘ “ For by nature ye be a very handsome  
‘ man, shepherd,” continued Joseph Poor-  
‘ grass, with winning suavity.

‘ “ Ay, that ye be,” said the company.

‘ “ Thank you very much,” said Oak, in  
‘ the modest tone good manners demanded,  
‘ thinking, however, that he would never let  
‘ Bathsheba see him playing the flute.’

Oak, however, in his robustness, was a fitter subject for plain speaking than Christian Cantle, who was, nevertheless, fated to endure much of it—

‘ “ Yes ; ‘ No moon, no man.’ ’Tis one of  
‘ the truest sayings ever spit out. The boy  
‘ never comes to anything that ’s born at new  
‘ moon. A bad job for thee, Christian, that  
‘ you should have showed your nose then of  
‘ all days in the month.”

“I suppose the moon was terrible full when you were born?” said Christian, with a look of hopeless admiration at Fairway.

“Well, ’a was not new,” Mr. Fairway replied, with a disinterested gaze.

“I’d sooner go without drink at Lammas-tide than be a man of no moon,” continued Christian, in the same shattered recitative. “’Tis said I be only the rames of a man, and no good in the world at all!”

Humour of this conscious kind, much of it expressing itself purposely by an artificial method, has its dangers, and Mr. Hardy has not always escaped them. There is an occasional difficulty in the joking. And any lack of genuine fun in an intentionally humorous scene is more evident in a novel of everyday life than would be the case in the more artificial setting of a stage drama. Some drolleries, too, that raise a smile quickly enough, suggest immediate acknowledgment to the author at the back of the speaker rather than to the speaker himself.

It is on this lighter side of Mr. Hardy's comedy that his only evident resemblance—and it is but a faint one—to George Eliot comes in. The shrewd or cynical things he puts into rustic mouths, like “‘Yes, matrimony ‘do begin ‘Dearly Beloved,’ and ends wi’ ‘‘Amazement,’ as the prayer book says” ;’ or ‘ ‘Doom ? Doom is nothing beside a elderly ‘woman” ;’ or ‘ ‘Enteren the Church is the ‘ruin of a man’s wit, for wit’s nothen with- ‘out a faint shadder o’ sin,”’ have a hint of the mind that created Mrs. Poyser. But Mr. Hardy’s rustics speak their epigrams out of rather more reckless hearts.

Perhaps to find a purpose for his wit and high spirits should be a disqualification for writing a chapter on a humourist at all. Yet, consciously or not, they are part of the plan of the novels. The most susceptible reader will probably drop few tears over Mr. Hardy’s stories. Pathos is not wanting, especially in his later books, but it is kept under, and utters itself unwillingly,

as often as not in mockery or irony. One sin he has not committed ; he has never been maudlin. And much of the sadness he expresses is of a kind tears do not come to relieve. Of that gentle pathos which is often the to-morrow of tragedy, or its pitying neighbour, you find little. But relief there must be, else the tension would be intolerable, and it comes in fun and farce, where these are congruous, or in irony of tone and circumstance.

Before considering his other claim to be regarded as a humourist, it is well to face the assertion that he is not one, for it has been made. Not that any argument is of use in a matter to which no recognisable laws can be applied. If the humour of the Wessex clowns be artificial and an acquired taste, it is well for the spirits and the lungs of the general that it is not too difficult of acquisition ; and there we must leave it. But the assertion includes not only an inaptitude to be amused by the Weatherbury



wits but a contemptuous amusement in the wrong place. A favourite example of his lack of humour is the talk of the dairy-maids concerning Angel Clare. Their conversation shows a want of the quality on their part, poor things. But that was a symptom of their malady : how many are the happily-constituted mortals who can combine the being desperately in love with a sense of the ludicrous? Perhaps Mr. Hardy here furnished matter for a smile, not a very broad one, without hoisting a signal of his intention—very bad policy, of course. But I venture the suggestion diffidently, for that there are lapses in the humour cannot be denied. Knight and Fitzpiers suffer from such, and so does the whole of ‘A Laodicean.’ The lapses are infrequent, however, and always strike a sympathetic reader as uncharacteristic.

It is possible to have a very hearty appreciation of the Wessex clowns and wits, and of their excellent fooling, and yet think

Mr. Hardy has better claims to the title of humourist than as being their creator. The general attitude of the novels towards life is that of a humourist. Indeed one might almost look on his tragedies as his translations of the immortals' sense of humour and their manner of ghastly jesting. But, at least, with few exceptions, he has his eye always on the comedy of circumstances. Some of the novels, like 'Two on a Tower,' lack humour in the detail, but have it in the central conception. There is abundance of it of an ironical kind in the contrast between Swithin and his lady, her passions burning hot at an earthly level, his flashing a cold keen light away among the Immensities. The whole of 'The Hand of Ethelberta' is a light satire on the absurd conventions that have given to class distinctions a sanctity no religion has ever won. 'Under the Greenwood Tree' and 'The Trumpet Major' are comedies throughout, written in a laughing mood, though there are sug-

gestions of gravity in the latter. If there were no Weatherbury rustics to make mirth, 'Far from the Madding Crowd' would still be a fine comedy. Bathsheba is better than the sum of all their wit or absurdity. She is looked at and watched and dissected by a humourist, a humane humourist. The incident of her quarrel with Gabriel after he had reproved her for encouraging Boldwood, her dismissal of him, the loss of her sheep, her appeal to him to return, and her reconciliation—a finely compounded mixture of interested and tender motives—could only have been drawn by a humourist of rare and delicate touch.

This attitude is less evident in 'Desperate Remedies,' in 'The Woodlanders,' in 'The Return of the Native,' and 'Tess,' if the sport of circumstances with poor human nature be not admitted as a manifestation of the quality. In 'A Group of Noble Dames' the humour is wrought in with the telling of the stories; in 'Life's

Little Ironies' it is not lacking, but it is gall to the taste ; there is something tonic in the gall, nevertheless.

Into much of the most vigorous humour there enters a certain grimness. Perhaps the finest bit of comedy in the novels is the scene in 'The Three Strangers' where the escaped convict waves cups with the hangman, and sings in his deep bass the chorus to the hangman's ghastly song, 'And on his 'soul may God ha' mercy.' The journey of Sol Chickerel with his prospective and undesired noble brother-in-law would make a good second, but there are rivals for the place. There is nothing comic about Wild-eve and the reddleman's game of dice by the light of the glowworms on the heath, yet it is comedy all the same, of a sardonic kind.

But Mr. Hardy's greatest manifestation of humour, outside purely amusing scenes, is in his conception of Henchard. Like all barbarians, the man shows as a great jest against the tameness, the low-spirited reason-

ableness of ordinary life. Wherever you look at him this jest is inextricably mixed with the tragic about him ; and I think no defence is needed for quoting, as illustrative of his author's humour, the scene of the ex-mayor's Sunday visit to the King of Prussia, where he demands music from the assembled choir-members—'hymns, ballets, or rantipole rubbish ; the Rogue's March or the cherubim's warble'—and then turns his craving for harmony into a savage demand that they should curse his rival :—

“ “ As 'tis Sunday, neighbours, suppose we  
' raise the Fourth Psa'm to Samuel Wakely's  
' tune, as improved by me ? ” ’ said the leader.

“ “ Hang Samuel Wakely's tune, as improved by thee ! ” said Henchard. “ Chuck  
' across one of your psalters—old Wiltshire is  
' the only tune worth singing—the psalm-tune  
' that would make my blood ebb and flow  
' like the sea when I was a steady chap.  
' I'll find some words to fit en.” ’ The words he finds are the terrible ones, ‘ His

seed shall orphans be,' ending with the ghastly triumph—

‘ And the next age his hated name  
Shall utterly deface.’

“‘I know the Psa’am—I know the Psa’am!’”  
‘ said the leader hastily ; “ but I would as lief  
‘ not sing it. ’Twasn’t made for singing.  
‘ We chose it once when the gipsies stole  
‘ the pa’son’s mare, thinking to please him,  
‘ but he were quite upset. Whatever Servant  
‘ David were thinking about when he made  
‘ a Psalm that nobody can sing without disgracing himself, I can’t fathom ! Now  
‘ then, the Fourth Psalm to Samuel Wakely’s  
‘ tune, as improved by me.”

““’Od seize your sauce—I tell ye to sing  
‘ the Hundred and Ninth, to Wiltshire, and  
‘ sing it you shall !” roared Henchard. “ Not  
‘ a single one of all the droning crew of ye  
‘ goes out of this room till that Psalm is  
‘ sung !” He slipped off the table, seized  
‘ the poker, and, going to the door, placed his  
‘ back against it. “ Now then, go ahead, if

‘ you don’t wish to have your cust pates  
‘ broken ! ”

‘ “ Don’t ’ee, don’t ’ee take on so !—As ’tis  
‘ the Sabbath day, and ’tis Servant David’s  
‘ words and not ours, perhaps we don’t mind  
‘ for once, hey ? ” said one of the terrified  
‘ choir, looking round upon the rest. So the  
‘ instruments were tuned and the com-  
‘ minatory verses sung.

‘ “ Thank ye, thank ye,” said Henchard in  
‘ a softened voice, his eyes growing downcast,  
‘ and his manner that of a man much moved  
‘ by the strains. “ Don’t you blame David,”  
‘ he went on in low tones, shaking his head  
‘ without raising his eyes. “ He knew what  
‘ he was about when he wrote that. If I  
‘ could afford it, be hanged if I wouldn’t  
‘ keep a church choir at my own expense to  
‘ play and sing to me at these low, dark times  
‘ of my life. But the bitter thing is, that when  
‘ I was rich I didn’t need what I could have,  
‘ and now I be poor I can’t have what I  
‘ need ! ” ’

The essential quality in this passage springs from the same deep underground root as poetry and tragedy, and Mr. Hardy has revealed enough of it from time to time to give him honourable rank among the greater humourists.



PROSE WRITER



## VII

### PROSE WRITER

IN popular meaning, style is a convenient quality, enabling one to make a guessing recognition of a writer without looking at his title-page, readily supplying adjectives for conversation, like 'obscure,' 'subtle,' or 'affected,' and suggesting mental efforts on the surface quite apart from the thinking-task the surface may enclose. 'Stylist' is too ugly a word to be grudged to those whose writing exactly fulfils these conditions : the masters of style in England, save only three or four whose eccentricities have been the inevitable expression of their genius,

have no mannerisms, perhaps not much superficial individuality; they cannot be neatly summed up in a descriptive phrase as guarantee they have been read, but they have a language at command commensurate with the force, and harmonious with the tone of the ideas they seek to express. [Mr. Hardy is no 'stylist,' perhaps less so than most writers of to-day. The consistency of the inner ideas, their variety, too, and the vividness of his imagination are his recognisable qualities.

But just as far as from extreme individualism is his style removed from that impersonal manner, the manner of Miss Austen and all the story-tellers pure and simple, where poetical and rhythmical phrasing are eschewed, and an occasional dry epigram or a palpable antithesis the only ornaments allowed. Fiction to-day, uttering much that was formerly expressed by poetry, the drama, and the other forms of the criticism of life, has borrowed from them their

richness and variety of pattern. Mr. Hardy's style reflects too much of his own personality to be of the neutral, colourless order. But it is not a livery; it is rather a series of garments waiting on his moods, and an examination of them would be describable by the most contradictory phrases. He is far from being an even writer. You may confidently seek in his stories some of the most beautiful and vigorous English prose of the century, and in the track of it you will run up and down almost every conceivable altitude. A master of style he is not, for, save in his shorter stories, he does not master it. It does not run away with him, as with overfluent writers, but it stiffens into rigidity sometimes, and he cannot shake it into freedom.

It reaches its height in certain tragic passages of his greater novels, and in descriptions of natural beauty in all of them; but it is most consistently admirable in his shorter tales. There he is unsurpassed for

the very qualities unhappily absent from much of his other work, for lightness, deftness, grace. Setting aside two or three that are a trifle flat in treatment, like 'Fellow-Townsmen,' 'Interlopers at the Knap,' and 'The Winters and the Palmeys,' it would be difficult to find in English or any other fiction more admirable craftsmanship. Their precise and delicate art reaches its consummation where tragedy or any very deep human interest, if present, is, at least, not uppermost, when he is in a bantering mood, playing with the humours and the ironies of life. There are no more deftly-told stories in the language than 'The First Countess of Wessex' and 'Lady Mottisfont,' more vigorous than 'The Three Strangers,' more fascinating than 'The Distracted Preacher.' And not these only, but others, too, are admirable in their proportions, in their simplicity, and their restraint. In his lighter, brighter moods he is like a sophisticated Goldsmith.

Yet there is a good deal in Mr. Hardy's writing for which only all the interest of the story and characters can compensate. The rigidity that marked 'Desperate Remedies' crops up again and again; especially is it felt in 'A Laodicean,' the least pliant of all, though it must be owned there is a certain consistency between the *parvenue* Paula, always standing on her uncertain dignity, and such a sentence as this: 'The ostensible ease with which she drew them into a bye conversation had perhaps the defect of proving too much: though her tacit contention that no love was in question was not incredible on the supposition that affronted pride alone caused her embarrassment'; and knowing the invariable correctness of Somerset's demeanour, we resign ourselves to hearing his strength of mind, after Paula had been very rude to him, expressed as a resolution 'to persevere in the heretofore satisfactory paths of art while life and faculties were

‘left, though every instant must proclaim  
‘that there would be no longer any col-  
‘lateral attraction in that pursuit.’ Other  
writers have fits of carelessness, when they  
are slipshod and vapid. When Mr. Hardy  
nods, he seems to sit particularly bolt  
upright, to pick his words and construct  
his sentences with more than ordinary  
elaboration. When he is bored he becomes  
formal, not listless. This kind of thing  
reappears almost every time conventional  
experiences, or incidents, or characters are  
dealt with; whenever, in short, he has  
imperfect sympathy with his subject. But  
imperfect sympathy does not explain it all.  
Very charmingly is Grace Melbury pre-  
sented; but the description is prefaced by  
a sentence or two that put readers out of  
tune for the good ones that follow. ‘From  
‘the highest point of view, to precisely  
‘describe a human being, the focus of a  
‘universe, how impossible! But, apart from  
‘transcendentalism, there never probably



‘lived a person who was in herself more  
‘completely a *reductio ad absurdum* of at-  
‘tempts to appraise a woman, even ex-  
‘ternally, by items of face and figure.’

The technicalities, the tags of philosophical, theological, and scientific reading that obtrude themselves from time to time are less objectionable. They are never quite irrelevant. Angel’s vocabulary, indeed, sounds unnecessarily high and extensive heard in the neighbourhood of a dairy; but, as in Paula’s case, there is a fitness in it, for, after all, he was brother of the man who took ‘A Counterblast to Agnosticism’ on a walking-tour. Perhaps it is only where the pedantic language is used in dealing with unlearned human nature that one seriously wishes it away. Simple organisms under the microscope of the scientist form the abundant material on which his learning and intellect are exercised. In imaginative literature something of the same kind must occasionally take

place; but the microscope and the method and vocabulary of science need not be too visible and audible. The vivid result in broad plain language is all that need appear. A flash or two of poetic insight does the thing most fittingly.

But having said that he has unhappy moments when his pen is formal and pedantic, and that only in a few of his books is there any evenness of delight, the rest of one's space is needed to point to his excellencies. It is a robust language he writes, never hazy, never wanting in grip. His lines are sure, and his acid bites deep. Take the picture of Henchard and his wife on their way to Weydon Priors fair. How admirably precise are all the essentials, how firm is the step of the narrative, a swinging gait, with lightness in it, and swayed constantly by the thoughts within! Any page whatsoever of 'The Trumpet Major' would serve as a model of trained and vigorous story-writing, so brisk and snell is it, so

clear-sounding and assured. Anne watching the *Victory* sail away with Nelson and Hardy and Bob on board will serve as example of his tensity and definiteness of expression: 'The wild, herbless, weather-worn promontory was quite a solitude, and, saving the one old lighthouse about fifty yards up the slope, scarce a mark was visible to show that humanity had ever been near the spot. Anne found herself a seat on a stone, and swept with her eyes the tremulous expanse of water around her that seemed to utter a ceaseless unintelligible incantation. . . The great silent ship, with her population of blue jackets, marines, officers, captain, and the admiral who was not to return alive, passed like a phantom the meridian of the Bill. Sometimes her aspect was that of a large white bat, sometimes that of a grey one. In the course of time the watching girl saw that the ship had passed her nearest point; the breadth of her sails diminished by foreshortening, till

‘ she assumed the form of an egg on end.  
‘ After this something seemed to twinkle ;  
‘ and Anne, who had previously withdrawn  
‘ from the old sailor, went back to him, and  
‘ looked again through the glass. The  
‘ twinkling was the light falling upon the  
‘ cabin windows of the ship’s stern. She ex-  
‘ plained it to the old man.

‘ “ Then we see now what the enemy have  
‘ seen but once. That was in seventy-nine,  
‘ when she sighted the French and Spanish  
‘ fleet off Scilly, and she retreated because  
‘ she feared a landing. Well, ’tis a brave  
‘ ship, and she carries brave men ! ” ’ . . .

‘ The *Victory* was fast dropping away.  
‘ She was on the horizon, and soon appeared  
‘ hull down. That seemed to be like the  
‘ beginning of a greater end than her present  
‘ vanishing. Anne Garland could not stay  
‘ by the sailor any longer, and went about  
‘ a stone’s-throw off, where she was hidden  
‘ by the inequality of the cliff from his view.  
‘ The vessel was now exactly end on, and

‘ stood out in the direction of the Start, her  
‘ width having contracted to the proportion  
‘ of a feather. . . .

‘ The courses of the *Victory* were absorbed  
‘ into the main, then her top-sails went, and  
‘ then her top-gallants. She was now no  
‘ more than a dead fly’s wing on a sheet of  
‘ spider’s web ; and even this fragment  
‘ diminished. Anne could hardly bear to  
‘ see the end, and yet she resolved not to  
‘ flinch. The admiral’s flag sank behind  
‘ the watery line, and in a minute the very  
‘ truck of the last topmast stole away. The  
‘ *Victory* was gone.

‘ Anne’s lip quivered as she murmured,  
‘ without removing her wet eyes from the  
‘ vacant and solemn horizon, “ ‘ They that  
‘ go down to the sea in ships, that do busi-  
‘ ness in great waters—— ’ ”

‘ “ ‘ These see the works of the Lord, and  
‘ His wonders in the deep,’ ” was returned  
‘ by a man’s voice from behind her.’

Examples of his style at its best are

examples of other gifts, too, which it is still more interesting to exemplify. This chapter, therefore, may rest with its general statements hardly at all served by particular instances. Elsewhere, serving another purpose, these will be found, and will prove that, notwithstanding his occasional awkward carefulness and formality of language, his wide-awake manner of dosing, Mr. Hardy has the strongest claims to be counted among the writers of fine prose in this century. He uses no catchwords; he has no tricks; no affectations; there is nothing cheap in what he has written. He has the ambition of a writer of romance and a poet to reveal passion and beauty and despair, the heart of man and the face of the world, and his best revelations have a sure preservative in the force, variety, and sincerity of his expression.

P A I N T E R   O F   N A T U R E





## VIII

### PAINTER OF NATURE

As an interpreter of the world out of doors, Mr. Hardy has no equal among English prose writers. At single points in the capacity for revealing Nature, many touch him. His greatest contemporary in English fiction has as much sympathy and perhaps as deep insight, but has not recorded his vision with such clearness. Jefferies and Kingsley were naturalists with poets' eyes, but neither approaches him in producing broad effects, or in the interpretation of the character of landscape. His reflective spirit abroad in the outer world puts one sometimes in mind of Thoreau, but in

Thoreau the brightness and colour are mainly in his own reflections : he reveals little in the outside things he chronicles. Hardy is more profitably compared with some poets, and allowing for differences of phrase and tone, the writer of late days whom he most resembles in his method of transcribing Nature is Tennyson. The intimate glance, as peering as a naturalist's, and as quick to see details, yet concerned mainly to extract the beauty and the character of the objects or the landscape, is the same. The balance for perfection of expression is on the side of the poet, for prose is but an awkward medium after all ; but Tennyson best used this gift in registering single events in Nature rather than pervading moods, and the temperament of the outside world, combined with the signs by which it is expressed, he has never put into words as Mr. Hardy has done.

With Tennyson, Nature is a thing to be rejoiced in, to be learnt by constant glances,

like the face of the beloved. With the novelist it is so, too, but still more is it a thing to live in sympathy with, or at least on terms of closest intimacy, a thing not only with a face but a heart as well. Nevertheless, it is to the school of Tennyson, rather than the less realistic one of Wordsworth, that Mr. Hardy is attached. His descriptive passages are an integral portion of the stories. You may know your Balzac, having skipped, out of the whole, what would amount to volumes, but you cannot know the Wessex novels with proportionate omissions. His landscapes are not even appropriate backgrounds merely, but living personalities that take sides or play the chorus to the drama. They are never vague. They arrest your attention as a keen-sighted friend who should point with his staff to what was happening along the road, or hush your chatter and make you listen. They are not merely illustrative of observation, but are essentially pictorial. You feel it is by the merest chance

they are not in colour rather than in printer's ink. Perhaps it is this painter's way of looking at things, this instinct of concentrating enthusiasm into the interpretation of such form and tone as shall express both fact and sentiment, that has prevented him from bursting into poetical measures to sing the joy of the beauty.

The knowledge with which he endows Angel, of 'the seasons in their moods, morning and evening, night and noon, in their temperaments; winds in their several dispositions; trees, waters, and clouds, shades and silences, *ignes fatui*; constellations, and the voices of inanimate things,' is his own. 'The Woodlanders' is a calendar of woodland life. He tells the clock by out-of-doors methods. There is a time of day written on his every landscape, and every time of day he has chronicled, from 'the twilight of the morning, in the violet or pink dawn,' till day has passed and night has come again. Here is one out of many morning pictures: 'The

' gray half-tones of daybreak are not the  
 ' gray half-tones of the day's close, though  
 ' the degree of their shade may be the same.  
 ' In the twilight of the morning light seems  
 ' active, darkness passive ; in the twilight of  
 ' evening it is the darkness which is active  
 ' and crescent, and the light which is the  
 ' drowsy reverse. ) . .

' The mixed, singular, luminous gloom in  
 ' which they walked along together to the  
 ' spot where the cows lay, often made him  
 ' think of the Resurrection hour . . . Whilst  
 ' all the landscape was in neutral-shade his  
 ' companion's face, which was the focus of  
 ' his eyes, rising above the mist stratum,  
 ' seemed to have a sort of phosphorescence  
 ' upon it. She looked ghostly, as if she were  
 ' merely a soul at large.' There follows on  
 this passage a marvellous picture of the life  
 abroad at this non-human hour.

Night, that strange personality, has had its  
 heart read again and again in 'The Wood-  
 landers' and 'The Return of the Native,'

but never has it been laid more open than in the picture of Oak at midnight on Norcombe Ewelease. A sentence or two may serve as a reminder to turn and read the the whole again. ‘Beneath this half-wooded, ‘half-naked hill, and the vague, still horizon ‘that its summit indistinctly commanded, ‘was a mysterious sheet of fathomless shade— ‘the sounds from which suggested that what ‘it concealed bore some resemblance to ‘features here. The thin grasses, more or ‘less coating the hill, were touched by the ‘wind in breezes of differing powers, and ‘almost of differing natures—one rubbing ‘the blades heavily, another raking them ‘piercingly, another brushing them like a ‘soft broom. The instinctive act of human- ‘kind was to stand and listen, and learn how ‘the trees on the right and the trees on the ‘left wailed or chaunted to each other in ‘the regular antiphonies of a cathedral choir; ‘how hedges and other shapes to leeward ‘then caught the note, lowering it to the

‘ tenderest sob ; and how the hurrying gust  
 ‘ then plunged to the south, to be heard no  
 ‘ more. . . . To persons standing on a hill  
 ‘ during a clear midnight such as this, the  
 ‘ roll of the world eastward is almost a pal-  
 ‘ pable movement. . . . Whatever be its  
 ‘ origin, the impression of riding along is  
 ‘ vivid and abiding.’

Though he has followed Nature’s gayer  
 moods with blitheness, as his strongest human  
 note is tragedy, so is his greatest Nature  
 revelation that of the earth in her sterner  
 phases. He has made ‘ haggard Egdon ’  
 for ever unforgettable.

‘ The spot was, indeed, a near relation of  
 ‘ night, and, when night showed itself, an  
 ‘ apparent tendency to gravitate together  
 ‘ could be perceived in its shades and the  
 ‘ scene. The sombre stretch of rounds and  
 ‘ hollows seemed to rise and meet the even-  
 ‘ ing gloom in pure sympathy, the heath ex-  
 ‘ haling darkness as rapidly as the heavens  
 ‘ precipitated it. . . . The place became

‘ full of a watchful intentness now ; for when  
‘ other things sank brooding to sleep, the  
‘ heath appeared slowly to awake and listen.  
‘ Every night its Titanic form seemed to  
‘ await something ; but it had waited thus,  
‘ unmoved, during so many centuries, through  
‘ the crises of so many things, that it could  
‘ only be imagined to await one last crisis—  
‘ the final overthrow. . . . During winter  
‘ darkness, tempests, and mists. . . . Egdon  
‘ was roused to reciprocity ; for it may be  
‘ said that the storm was its lover, and the  
‘ wind its friend. Then it became the home  
‘ of strange phantoms ; and it was found to  
‘ be the hitherto unrecognised original of  
‘ those wild regions of obscurity which are  
‘ vaguely felt to be compassing us about in  
‘ midnight dreams of flight and disaster,  
‘ and are never thought of after the dream  
‘ till revived by scenes like this. . . .  
‘ As with some persons who have long  
‘ lived their lives apart, solitude seemed to  
‘ look out of its countenance. It had a



‘lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities.’

There is hardly a natural event that in more than one aspect he has not chronicled. The rain-storm in ‘Under the Greenwood Tree’ is as true to fact as anything he has done later, but the memorable storm-picture is that of Oak and Bathsheba saving the ricks. From Troy’s senseless revelry Oak goes out into the night, and finds one, then another and another message from the Great Mother of strange things coming to pass : the toad crossing the path, the slug seeking indoor refuge, the terror of the sheep—

‘Time went on, and the moon vanished not to reappear. It was the farewell of the ambassador previous to war. The night had a haggard look, like a sick thing ; and there came finally an utter expiration of air from the whole heaven in the form of a slow breeze, which might have been likened to a death. . . . Heaven opened then, indeed. . . . It was a perfect dance of

‘ death. The forms of skeletons appeared  
‘ in the air, shaped with blue fire for bones—  
‘ dancing, leaping, striding, racing around,  
‘ and mingling altogether in unparalleled  
‘ confusion. With these were intertwined un-  
‘ dulating snakes of green. Behind these was  
‘ a broad mass of lesser light. . . . Oak had  
‘ hardly time to gather up these impressions  
‘ into a thought, and to see how strangely  
‘ the red feather of her hat shone in this  
‘ light, when the tall tree on the hill before-  
‘ mentioned seemed on fire to a white heat,  
‘ and a new one among these terrible voices  
‘ mingled with the last crash of those preced-  
‘ ing. It was a stupefying blast, harsh and  
‘ pitiless, and it fell upon their ears in a dead,  
‘ flat blow, without that reverberation which  
‘ lends the tones of a drum to more distant  
‘ thunder.’

Sensitive discrimination of the ear is a rarer endowment than that of the eye. You feel it is his in the opening lines of ‘ Under the Greenwood Tree,’ in the song at night

among the water-meadows in 'The Mayor of Casterbridge,' but its triumph is in his translation of the wind over Egdon—

'Gusts in innumerable series followed each other from the north-west, and when each one of them raced past, the sound of its progress resolved into three. Treble, tenor, and bass notes were to be found therein. The general ricochet of the whole over pits and prominences had the gravest pitch of the chime. Next there could be heard the baritone buzz of a holly-tree. Below these in force, above them in pitch, a dwindled voice strove hard at a husky tune, which was the peculiar local sound alluded to—that is, the sound of the wind in the heather—like 'the ruins of human song which remain to the throat of fourscore and ten. It was a worn whisper, dry and papery, and it brushed so distinctly across the ear that, by the accustomed, the material minutæ in which it originated could be realised as by touch. . . . One inwardly saw the

‘ infinity of those combined multitudes ; and  
‘ perceived that each of the tiny trumpets  
‘ was seized on, entered, scoured and  
‘ emerged from by the wind as thoroughly as  
‘ if it were as vast as a crater.

‘ “ The spirit moved them.” ’

He is a great pleinairist, occasionally content to render only colour and facts, but far more often painting landscape broadly, with a perfect eye not only for topographical features, but for the character to be read in the lines, and for the mood in the tones of the atmosphere. The picture of Sherton in early autumn, of Ethelberta’s view from the giant’s grave over Purbeck, the description of the kindly languorous Vale of Blackmore, and of the sparkling valley of the Great Dairies, can hardly pass out of the mind of those to whom natural beauty appeals ; and how rarely can that be said of pictures made in words !

His treatment of landscape is more than pictorial : it is sometimes dramatic. A very

casual reading of the stories will leave in the memory, apart from general impressions, a larger number of clearly defined scenes in which time and place and circumstance agree to make a climax of picturesqueness, than will the works of almost any other writer of fiction. Anne Garland looking from the mill towards the down where the scattering of the sheep tells of the first arrival of the soldiers ; the dark figure seen by the reddleman on the barrow against the night sky ; the dairyman and maids creeping along the meads to discover the noxious weed that gave the butter a 'twang,' flash up on the memory at once. So does the picture of Stonehenge, before the policemen come on the scene—their advent is unforgiveable : why didn't Tess and Angel double, and get caught in Old Sarum ? But the most masterly of all such pictures is that of the turnip-field at Flintcomb Ash—

'The swede-field in which she and her companion were set hacking was a stretch

‘ of a hundred odd acres, in one patch, on  
‘ the highest ground of the farm, rising  
‘ above stony lanchets or lynchets—the out-  
‘ crop of siliceous veins in the chalk forma-  
‘ tion, composed of myriads of loose white  
‘ flints in bulbous, cusped, and phallic  
‘ shapes. The upper half of each turnip  
‘ had been eaten off by the live-stock, and  
‘ it was the business of the two women to  
‘ grub up the lower or earthy half of the  
‘ root with a hooked fork called a hacker,  
‘ that it might be eaten also. Every leaf of  
‘ the vegetable having already been con-  
‘ sumed, the whole field was in colour a  
‘ desolate drab ; it was a complexion with-  
‘ out features, as if a face, from chin to  
‘ brow, should be only an expanse of skin.  
‘ The sky wore, in another colour, the same  
‘ likeness ; a white vacuity of countenance  
‘ with the lineaments gone. So these two  
‘ upper and nether visages confronted each  
‘ other all day long, the white face looking  
‘ down on the brown face, and the brown

‘face looking up at the white face, without  
 ‘anything standing between them but the  
 ‘two girls crawling over the surface of the  
 ‘former like flies.’

The effects of light and flame are noted as if he had lived for the purpose. Fires fascinate him. The one at the Three Tranters in ‘Desperate Remedies’ is excellently precise and impressive. There is the burning of De Stancy Castle, too; and the fire in Bathsheba’s rickyard. But the bonfires on Egdon give him his best opportunity—

‘Red suns and tufts of fire one by one  
 ‘began to arise, flecking the whole country  
 ‘round. They were the bonfires of other  
 ‘parishes and hamlets that were engaged in  
 ‘the same sort of commemoration. Some  
 ‘were distant, and stood in a dense atmo-  
 ‘sphere, so that bundles of pale straw-like  
 ‘beams radiated around them in the shape  
 ‘of a fan. Some were large and near, glow-  
 ‘ing scarlet-red from the shade, like wounds

‘ in a black hide. Some were Mænades,  
‘ with winy faces and blown hair. These  
‘ tintured the silent bosom of the clouds  
‘ above them and lit up their ephemeral  
‘ caves, which seemed henceforth to become  
‘ scalding caldrons.’ . . .

‘ All was unstable ; quivering as leaves,  
‘ evanescent as lightning. Shadowy eye-  
‘ sockets, deep as those of a death’s head,  
‘ suddenly turned into pits of lustre : a lan-  
‘ tern-jaw was cavernous, then it was shining ;  
‘ wrinkles were emphasized to ravines, or  
‘ obliterated entirely by a changed ray.  
‘ Nostrils were dark wells ; sinews in old  
‘ necks were gilt mouldings ; things with no  
‘ particular polish on them were glazed ;  
‘ bright objects, such as the tip of a furze-  
‘ hook one of the men carried, were as  
‘ glass ; eyeballs glowed like little lanterns.  
‘ Those whom Nature had depicted as  
‘ merely quaint became grotesque, the  
‘ grotesque became preternatural ; for all  
‘ was in extremity.’



(Nature and human nature in his dramas act ~~and~~ react on each other with constant power. The mood and will of Nature now rule the mood and fate of man, and again Nature is defied by the spirit of man, and conquered for the time, made to glance back to him his own temper, smiling or gloomy. It is interesting to divide Nature interpreters into their two classes, those who love her and demand no sympathy, but take her weal or woe for theirs, so far as they can share them, and those who claim sympathy from her, and invent it if it be not forthcoming. Mr. Hardy is in both classes ; still with him the mood of Nature over the mood of man predominates.)

His knowledge of the outside world is a double one, that of a countryman and of an artist. As to its artistic side, if the examples have been ill chosen, readers will find better ones in the books themselves. His countryman's knowledge is no less certain. He has himself set down the differ-

ence between the outsiders and the intimates of rural life in a fine passage in 'The Woodlanders'—

'The casual glimpses which the ordinary  
' population bestowed upon that wondrous  
' world of sap and leaves called the Hintock  
' woods had been with these two, Giles and  
' Marty, a clear gaze. They had been pos-  
' sessed of its finer mysteries as of common-  
' place knowledge; had been able to read  
' its hieroglyphs as ordinary writing; to  
' them the sights and sounds of night,  
' winter, wind, storm, amid those dense  
' boughs, which had to Grace a touch of  
' the uncanny, and even of the supernatural,  
' were simple occurrences whose origin, con-  
' tinuance, and laws they foreknew. They  
' had planted together, and together they  
' had felled; together they had, with the  
' run of the years, mentally collected those  
' remoter signs and symbols which seen in  
' few were of runic obscurity, but all together  
' made an alphabet. From the light lashing

' of the twigs upon their faces when brush-  
 ' ing through them in the dark, they could  
 ' pronounce upon the species of the tree  
 ' whence they stretched ; from the quality  
 ' of the wind's murmur through a bough  
 ' they could in like manner name its sort  
 ' afar off. They knew by a glance at a  
 ' trunk if its heart were sound, or tainted  
 ' with incipient decay ; and by the state of  
 ' its upper twigs the stratum that had been  
 ' reached by its roots. The artifices of the  
 ' seasons were seen by them from the con-  
 ' juror's own point of view, and not from  
 ' that of the spectator.' And to that inti-  
 macy he has himself been far admitted.

But he has something besides that is  
 warmer than the artist's love, tenderer than  
 the countryman's, a rapturous glory in the  
 beauty of the world as of one infinite and  
 magnificent certainty. He makes Tess sing  
 the pæan, ' O ye Sun and Moon ' in a burst  
 of pure Pagan joy. That instinctive grateful  
 joy is his own throughout, though it oftener

speaks in pictures than in rhapsodies. There are dark chapters in Mr. Hardy's book of the meaning of life, but the dark is not all he knows: the beauty is just as sure. When Lavengro and Mr. Petulengro discourse, one sunset, on the heath, on death, their dialogue sums up much of the poetry and the philosophy of the Wessex novels. Mr. Hardy's two adverse but compatible moods might be holding converse with each other—

“Life is sweet, brother.”

“Do you think so?”

“Think so! There's night and day, brother, both sweet things; sun, moon, and stars, brother, all sweet things; there is likewise a wind on the heath. Life is very sweet, brother; who would wish to die?”

“I would wish to die——”

“... Wish to die, indeed! A Romany Chal would wish to live for ever!”

“In sickness, Jasper?”

“There's the sun and stars, brother.”

“In blindness, Jasper?”

“There's the wind on the heath, brother.”

W E S S E X

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## IX

### WESSEX

It need hardly be said that Mr. Hardy's Wessex does not coincide with the old West Saxon kingdom. Nor has he deliberately chosen to call by the name any particularly homogeneous part of the ancient division, but rather the section covered by his own observations. The name, in his limited sense, was first used in *Cornhill*, in 1874, where 'Far from the Madding Crowd' was then running as a serial. It includes, till now, parts of Somerset, Wiltshire, Berkshire, Devon, and Hampshire, and the whole of Dorset. Its area would be nearly enclosed by a vertical line drawn from Exeter to the

Bristol Channel, thence by the coast to the mouth of the Avon and Bristol, by a line from Bristol to Reading, and another from Reading southward to the sea: the coast from Portsmouth to Exeter would be the southern boundary. These boundaries may, of course, be overstepped in future novels. The names of the counties are not used, but, instead, such divisions as South, Mid, North, Outer, Lower, and Upper Wessex. Outer Wessex has Taunton for its chief centre. Lower Wessex lies along the coast of the Bristol Channel, Upper Wessex along the south-eastern coast of Hampshire.

Love and patriotism have glorified many poorly dowered places; but it happens that the region that had Mr. Hardy's first affections and has kept them, is one of singular variety and beauty. Its history is graven on its surface in wonderful characters. Everywhere springing up amid the new life are relics of a far back past, camps, barrows, giants' graves, stone circles, reminders of a



forgotten worship, of a strenuous warfare, and of a patience and skill before which our modern conceit falls to pieces. The contrast of this long past with a present, home-like and familiar, but with no brand new crudity, counts for much in the interest of Wessex and its chronicles.] Wessex life has a marvellous continuity, which may be partly accounted for by remoteness from the capital, by the agricultural and pastoral occupations, and partly by the essential character of the people. Mr. Hardy has given us the picked ones, maybe, but his is not the only evidence that they are a race of strong individuality and humour. These characteristics grafted on their ignorance, till a recent date, of the ways of the outer world, have made them a rich quarry for the student of humankind to dig in. A writer who has made close observations of peasant life in various parts of England, picks out the Dorset folks for special commendation for certain intellectual and social qualities ;

speaks of their wit, their ready appreciation of irony, their 'native inbred refinement,' their great desire for instruction, and declares them to be 'neither sad nor suspicious.' Barnes is more cautious in his statements, but admits that 'if they are not witty, they try to show themselves so'; he has no doubt of their enjoyment of fun, and speaks of the 'lively and sprack-witted young women.' A casual wanderer through the county, with no special opportunity for coming into intimate relations with the folk, would at least report them to be more than usually articulate. They are neither morose nor abashed, and their tongues are both ready and courteous.

[Mr. Hardy uses to some extent the vocabulary, but hardly at all the dialect of the people. Barnes in his 'Poems of Rural Life' wrote either in the Dorsetshire speech or in English.] The novelist has his own method of giving the spirit and preserving the peculiarities of the speech in a way that

will be intelligible to his readers in other parts of the country. But of that I have spoken elsewhere.

With regard to the identifications of the scenes of Mr. Hardy's stories, I should say they have mostly been made by means of maps and personal recognition on the spot, and, as such, are fallible. Besides, Mr. Hardy is an artist, not a photographer: and he does not write guide-books. His accuracy in detail, where he chooses to make use of the quality, is marvellous; but every place that has served him as model or suggestion he has described by the light of imaginative insight more than of memory.

A word as to the names he uses. They, too, are of the soil. Wessex place names have been one source of his supply of family names: witness Melbury, Winterborne, Motisfont, Venn, Chickerel, Millborne, and Troy. With regard to place-names he has followed no general rules. In 'The Trumpet Major,'

save for Overcombe, he has given the real ones. Occasionally, as in 'The Distracted Preacher,' he has mixed real and invented ones. Mostly he has changed all the names, sometimes substituting an older form as in Shaston (Shaftesbury), Kingsbere (Bere Regis), Wellbridge (Woolbridge), Abbot's Cernel (Cerne Abbas), Ivell (Yeovil), St. Aldhelm's Head (St. Alban's Head); sometimes he has made a modification of the real name, or received a suggestion from it, as in Sher-ton Abbas (Sherborne), Exonbury (Exeter), Toneborough (Taunton), Emminster (Beaminster), Port Bredy (Bridport), Casterbridge (Dorchester), Long Puddle (Piddlehentride), Chaseborough (Cranborough), Wintoncester (Winchester), Evershead (Evershott). Others are outright inventions, made, of course, with an ear for local probability.

Casterbridge is a good centre from which to reach the scenes of many of the stories. In one of them it is drawn with perfect art and truth, and Mr. Hardy's own town is admirably fitted for such treatment. The

character stamped on it is not the mark of a life that has passed into decay, but of a sturdy present making use of and blending with the past. The story of 'The Mayor of Casterbridge' opens, however, with the famous wife-selling scene at Weydon Priors—by no means the first shady transaction that has taken place at the old Hampshire fair of Weyhill: Langland's 'Avaricia' tells of some he was concerned in when 'To Wy and to Wynchestre I went to þ faire.' Susan, the wife, and Elizabeth-Jane, her daughter, come back many years after, and trace Henchard to Casterbridge. "It is huddled 'all together; and it is shut in a by a 'square wall of trees, like a plot of garden ground by a box-edging,'" says Elizabeth-Jane, very aptly, on their approach. Every feature, all the character, the avenues of limes and chestnuts, the green escarpments and walls, the streets, the inns, the markets, are noted with nice precision and perfect pictorial effect. Even to-day this is true in spirit—'It stood, with regard

‘ to the wide fertile land adjoining, clean-  
‘ cut and distinct, like a chess-board on a  
‘ green table-cloth. The farmer’s boy could  
‘ sit under his barley-mow and pitch a stone  
‘ into the office-window of the town-clerk ;  
‘ reapers at work among the sheaves nodded  
‘ to acquaintances standing on the pave-  
‘ ment-corner ; the red-robed judge, when  
‘ he condemned a sheep-stealer, pronounced  
‘ sentence to the tune of Baa, that floated  
‘ in at the window from the remainder of  
‘ the flock browsing hard by.’ Just outside  
the town, on the Weymouth Road, is the  
Ring, Maumbury Ring, the great Roman  
amphitheatre, where Henchard renewed  
acquaintance with Susan. ‘Melancholy,  
‘ impressive, lonely, yet accessible from  
‘ every part of the town, the historic circle  
‘ was the frequent spot for appointments of  
‘ a furtive kind,’ always excepting those ‘of  
‘ happy lovers.’ . . . ‘Some old people said  
‘ that at certain moments in the summer  
‘ time, in broad daylight, persons sitting

‘ with a book, or dozing in the arena, had,  
‘ on lifting their eyes, beheld the slopes  
‘ lined with a gazing legion of Hadrian’s  
‘ soldiery as if watching the gladiatorial  
‘ combat ; and had heard the roar of their  
‘ excited voices ; that the scene would re-  
‘ main but a moment, like a lightning flash,  
‘ and then disappear.’ The ‘ ancient square  
‘ earthwork,’ on which the Mayor planned  
his unhappy entertainment, is Poundbury  
Camp, where the annual sheep-fair is held.  
The neighbourhood of Mixen Lane, the  
‘ mildewed leaf in the sturdy and flourish-  
‘ ing Casterbridge plant,’ is recognisable  
even in its happier condition of to-day, to  
the east of the town, by the river, and near  
the bridges. Crossing them you reach the  
water-meadows and Ten Hatches, associated  
with the misery of the mayor. When he  
left the place at last, ‘ his path, like that of  
‘ the Canadian woodsman, became part of a  
‘ circle, of which Casterbridge formed the  
‘ centre,’ till worn out in spirit he lay down

in his old servant's hut in Egdon to die, having ended his strange will with the command that no man should remember him. The jail is connected with the fine story of 'The Three Strangers,' and with the terrible scene in 'The Withered Arm.' Rhoda and Gertrude Lodge come to their strange meeting there from the meads lower down the river, near Stoke, in the Wareham neighbourhood. The 'ivied manor-house flanked 'by battlemented towers,' the home of the Lady Penelope, is the old house of Wolve-ton, just beyond the town, on the north side. It was into Casterbridge Union that poor Fanny stumbled to die. But the town has more cheerful associations. Eastward, remoter in fact than the few miles of distance would signify, are Lewgate and Mellstock, the homes of the famous choir in which the Dewys played their distinguished parts. At Casterbridge statute fair, when no man would hire him, Oak piped with Arcadian sweetness for pence and the cheer-



ing of his heart. Into the Corn Exchange on market-days, among the heavy yeomen, glided fair Bathsheba, 'moved between them ' as a chaise among carts, was heard after ' them as a romance after sermons, was felt ' among them like a breeze among furnaces,' yet intent on business, and 'holding up the ' grains in her narrow palm for inspection ' in perfect Casterbridge manner.' Her home lay near Puddleton, the fine old house of Waterston probably suggesting the description of the farm at Weatherbury. The road between Weatherbury and Casterbridge echoes with the footsteps and wheels of Mr. Hardy's folk. Along it lies Yalbury (Yellowham) Wood, scene of Dick's desperate nutting raid, and his reconciliation with Fancy. Some miles eastward, on the other side of Weatherbury, looking over the little forgotten town of Bere, is Greenhill, the place of 'the Nijni Novgorod of Wessex,' a waning glory now, but in its full force on that fine September morning when Bath-

sheba's and Boldwood's flocks were driven there, and Serjeant Troy played the part of Turpin in the 'Ride to York.' It is a veritable green hill this great earthwork where the fair is held; but its name outside the novels is Woodbury. The carrier's van bearing, on that 'Saturday afternoon of blue 'and yellow autumn time,' the burden of story-telling passengers to whom we owe the 'Crusted Characters,' started from the noted bridges, and took its entertaining way to Longpuddle, which may be identified as Piddlehentrive. The same highway was the scene of the 'nunny-watch,' into which his gallantry led Tony Kytes—the young man who, in return for the women's likings, 'loved 'em in shoals.' While in the neighbourhood you may trace some part of Pa'son Billy's course over Climmerston (perhaps Walterstone) Ridge to Yalbury Wood, that reckless day when Andrey and his bride, locked up in the church tower, waited in vain for parson and clerk to marry them.

One memorable feature in the neighbourhood of the town will hardly let itself be passed by unnoticed. Merely mentioned in 'The Mayor of Casterbridge,' the great ramparts of Mai-dun, or Maiden Castle, have hardly formed the background for any story. Indeed, they might almost overawe a storyteller into leaving them unused. They are the subject of one of Mr. Hardy's finest descriptions, nevertheless, as he saw, or rather felt, their surrounding presence one raging night of hail and wind. In 'Earthworks at Casterbridge,' first published in an American periodical some years ago, and reprinted in the *English Illustrated Magazine*, December 1893, there is a little thread of grotesque story; but in the main it is a description, needless to say, the finest that exists, of perhaps the most remarkable relic of past times left in England.

The Frome Valley calls to mind not only Tess. Lewgate and Mellstock and Stickleford lie on its north side, the first two

associated with the Dewys, and all with Mop Ollamoor, 'whose fiddle would well nigh have 'drawn an ache from a gate-post.' On the road from Stinsford to Tincleton you may possibly come across them. At Anglebury, which is Wareham, at the junction of the Frome and the Puddle, Ethelberta makes her first appearance; and here her various pursuers meet, or just miss, that morning when they are severally determined to prevent her marriage with Mountclere. One of the Stoke villages not far off must mark the near neighbourhood of Lodge's dairy where Rhoda was employed, whither she returned many years after her son's tragedy in Casterbridge jail, and where 'sometimes, 'those who knew her experiences would 'stand and observe her, and wonder what 'sombre thoughts were beating inside that 'impassive, wrinkled brow, to the rhythm of 'the alternating milk-streams.'

But Rhoda's story seems more a part of Egdon Heath, near where her own hut stood,

and where Conjuror Trendle dwelt who read her influence on Gertrude's withered arm. The whole drama of 'The Return of the Native' passes within a small portion of Egdon Heath, and Egdon is the name given to all the wild moorland between Dorchester and Poole Harbour. It is broken now into many parts : into Morden, and Bere, and Wool, and Duddle, and other heaths ; but the attempts at cultivation have met with desperate resistance, and the breaks into green strips of cornfields slip the memory on a back-look at that lonely land. Broader stretches of moorland, reaching immensity, will be found elsewhere, but the gloom, not black, but made of a secretion of all the rich colours of darkness, is nowhere more intense, while the lines formed by hill and mound and cresting barrow have, especially in the western portion, a grandeur not measured by height or length or any other dimension. Its lonely face, and the face of all heath-lands are interpreted in 'The

Return of the Native.' Mr. Hardy's sketch-map of the scene of the story, given in all save the popular editions of the book, makes clear the respective situations of Bloomsend and Alderworth, Mistover and Shadwater Weir, marks too the character of the surface, with its fringing meadows, its barrows, and sparse trees. You may look westward rather than eastward for such a tract of country, to a region where thorn-trees are a special feature of the heath ; but if you fail, as is probable, to find it, it matters little, for all Egdon is haunted by the gloomy beauty of Eustacia who walks still in her prisoned discontent.

Some of the best of the stories draw us to the coast. First 'The Trumpet Major,' of course. You may look in vain now for the actual dwelling-place of the miller, and Mrs. Garland, and Anne. The old mill house at Sutton Pointz to the north-east of Weymouth—here called Weymouth, not Budmouth as in the rest of the stories—has been pulled down, and a red brick one has

recently taken its place. But the stream is there, and the downs where the soldiers camped, and if your imagination be worth anything you will still see the Trumpet Major's epaulettes and Anne's yellow gipsy hat in the garden, and hear him speaking to her at a discreet distance in 'deep firm accents ' across the gooseberry bushes or through the ' tall rows of flowering peas.' If you climb the downs above the mill you may see, if your eyes and the atmosphere permit, what the Overcombe folks saw when they gathered there to watch for the king : ' Weymouth and Deadman's Bay beyond, ' and Portland, lying on the sea to the left of ' these, like a great crouching animal tethered ' to the mainland. On the extreme east of ' the marine horizon, St. Alban's Head ' closed the scene, the sea to the southward ' of that point glaring like a mirror under ' the sun. Inland could be seen Badbury ' Rings [beyond Sturminster Marshall], ' where a beacon had been recently erected, ' and farther to the left Bulbarrow [over-

‘looking Blackmore Vale], where another  
‘beacon stood. Not far from this came  
‘Nettlecombe Tout [to the left of Bulbar-  
‘row]; to the west, Dogberry Hill, and  
‘Black’on near to the foreground.’ Black’on,  
or Blackdown, is conspicuous enough now  
with its tall monument to the memory of  
Nelson’s Hardy, to whose house at Porti-  
sham Bob walked, after dodging the press-  
gang, to beg from him a berth on the  
*Victory*. North of Weymouth is little Radi-  
pole, where Anne was comforted in her  
grief by the king, and from whence she  
departed for Overcombe with ‘visions of  
‘Bob promoted to the rank of admiral, or  
‘something equally wonderful, by the king’s  
‘special command, the chief result of the  
‘promotion being in her arrangement of the  
‘piece, that he should stay at home and go  
‘to sea no more.’

The same downs call up the story of ‘The  
Melancholy Hussar,’ the sensitive Matthäus  
Tina, who, love-sick for Phyllis and home-



sick for the Fatherland, planned the escape for which he was shot as a deserter. Farther to the east, by Lulworth Cove, Solomon Selby, watching the ewes and the young lambs by night, had the vision of the 'two 'men in boat cloaks, cocked hats, and 'swords,' looking at a chart of the channel by aid of a dark lantern. One of them, with 'his bullet head, his short neck, and his 'round yaller cheeks and chin, his gloomy 'face, and his great glowing eyes,' he declared to his dying day was Boney.

Admirers, and they must be many, of the fascinating Lizzie Newberry, desiring to keep pace with her adventures, may identify her village of Nethermynton as Overmoyne, on the highroad from Dorchester to Wareham. There good Mr. Stockdale, sent to care for souls, found himself aiding and abetting smugglers, and loving to distraction the smuggler-in-chief, whose staggering defence was that she dissented from State as he from Church. His on route that exciting

night when he pursued her unbeknown can easily be traced over the hill to Holworth, thence to the cliff above Ringworth (Ringstead) Bay. The next night when he went along with her protestingly but protectingly, their road lay over Lord's Barrow, by Chalton Down, thence to Lullstead (Lulworth) Cove. That was the last escapade before the desperate search of the exasperated excisemen for the 'things' sacrilegiously stored away below Overmoyne church tower.

'Fellow Townsman,' another coast story, has Port Bredy, which is Bridport, for its scene, 'An Imaginative Woman,' Southsea, or a seaside town in its near neighbourhood. Avice Caro's home was in Portland Isle. Knollsea, where many of the leisure moments of Ethelberta's busy scheming life were spent, is Swanage. It is the place of her hurried wedding, too, with Mountclere. From here she set out on her famous donkey-ride to the Imperial Archæological Association's meeting at Combe, otherwise Corfe Castle. On her way, standing on the Giant's

Grave, she had that magnificent view over Purbeck and the Channel, which makes one of the two or three great passages in the book. Sandbourne, the watering-place of sudden growth like the 'prophet's gourd,' 'an exotic on the borders of a prehistoric region where not a sod had been turned since the days of Cæsar,' is Bournemouth, associated with Ethelberta's and Picotee's history, but more tragically with that of Tess. Havenpool, where Joliffe gave public thanks in church for his marvellous escape, is Poole. Here his wife, after having sent him and her sons away, for her ambitious ends, waited and waited their return from the sea that never gave them up.

North from Poole you reach the picturesque old town of Warborne, Wimborne Minster, where Swithin had his schooling, a "place where they draw up young gam'sters' brains like rhubarb under a nine-penny pan, my lady, excusing my common way." The lonely tower, where he carried on his astronomical observations and Viviette's

heart was captured by his beauty, might well be imaginary, but perhaps we shall not be far wrong in thinking the observatory at Horton, about five miles or so north of Wimborne, gave the first suggestion of it. Chene Manor, from which Barbara, of the House of Grebe, escaped to join young Willowes, stood where now stands Canford Magna, rather more than a mile to the south of Wimborne. Ten miles north, on the same road, was and is Lord Uplandtowers' place of St. Giles. Shottsford Forum, the home of Willowes, the glass-painter's son, is Blandford, 'where the art lingered on when it had died 'out in every other part of England.' Lornton Inn, where Willowes met Barbara on the night of the elopement, and where Lord Uplandtowers found her waiting vainly for her husband the day he was to have come home from his travels a cultivated gentleman, is Horton Inn, 'between the Forest and the Chase.' Continuing on the same road and crossing into the next county you

reach Melchester, easily recognisable as Salisbury, which has a part in many of the stories. There Fancy made the mistake between All Saints and All Souls that cost her her marriage with Troy. Viviette married its bishop, though her heart was with Swithin. Raye had his strange meeting there with Edith Harnham, when he was 'on ' the Western Circuit ' ; and there Mountclere tested Ethelberta's feelings for Julian, organist in the Cathedral, so roughly as to nearly lose her. Angel and Tess passed through it on their way to Stonehenge.

The Hintocks, Great and Little, of 'The ' Woodlanders,' may be looked for in the neighbourhood of the Minternes, on the road from the county town to Sherborne. Here, among the trees that made a friendly home to Giles and Marty, Felice, down in the deep shrouded glen, fretted her life out, and for very loneliness stole the heart of Grace's husband. Buckland Fitzpiers, perhaps Okeford St. Pain, the home of the

aristocratic ancestors of Grace's husband, lies across Blackmore Vale, and to the south-west of it is Middleton Abbey (Milton Abbas), whither Felice drew the infatuated surgeon, his wife watching him ride off into the vale and over the high plateau, its southern boundary, visible afar on his white horse; while moving up the valley to her came the loyal Giles from his cider-making, looking and smelling like 'autumn's very 'brother.' The Woodlanders' market-town is not Casterbridge, but Sherton, six miles off. Here Marty sells her beautiful hair; Giles meets his old love, returned a fine lady from school. From the height of the windows of the Earl of Wessex and her honeymoon dignity, she looks down on him with his cider-press and specimen apple-tree; and in the Abbey aisles near by they walk together, when through sorrow she has found out all she has lost by her worldly marriage. As has been noted in another chapter, Sherborne is also the scene of the Lady Baxby story in the 'Noble Dames.'

To the Hintock villages, by Long Ash Lane —part of the north road from Casterbridge, ‘once a highway to Queen Elizabeth’s court,’ yet so narrow that ‘the brambles of the ‘hedge, which hung forward like anglers’ ‘rods over a stream, scratched their hats ‘and curry-combed their whiskers, as they ‘passed,’ Darton and Japheth Johns journeyed on the unfortunate courting expedition to the Knap. King’s Hintock Court, ‘one of the most imposing of the mansions ‘that overlook our beautiful Blackmoor or ‘Blakemore Vale,’ is Melbury House. Here Betty Dornell lived with her mother, the heiress of the Strangways, with her father too, save when he quarrelled with his ambitious wife and rode off to his own place of Falls, twenty miles away on the other side of Ivell (Yeovil). Falls is Mells Park, in Somerset. Between the two houses plays the story, save for the visit to London where the child-marriage took place, and for the journey to Bristol, where the puff-

ing angry squire met his courtly son-in-law.

In following the fortunes of Tess, you pass over a good part of the county. Marlott, her early home, lies in Blackmore Vale, 'where the fields are never brown and the 'springs never dry,' between Stourminster and Shaftesbury. Her search for fortune at the bidding of her family, led her to Trantridge, near Chaseborough, the home of the sham D'Urbervilles, possibly Pentridge, near Cranbourne, a place identified too, with the interesting 'incident in the life of Mr. George 'Crookhill.' After her sad home-coming, when the forces of her nature revived again, she set off once more 'on a thyme-scented, 'bird-hatching morning in May,' south this time, by Stourminster, Weatherbury (Puddletown), over part of Egdon, to the valley of the Great Dairies. Sorrow has its home there as elsewhere, but there is something fitting in making the sparkling Frome Valley, with its flocks of browsing kine, its pure



streams, its wealth of flowers, the scene of the renewal of Tess's hopefulness. On the eventful ride with the milk-pails to Well-bridge (Wool), Angel and Tess passed the 'fragment of the old manor house of Caroline 'date,' that was to have such an effect on her fortunes. Here she came as a bride to this home of her ancestors, Old Wool-bridge House, spoken of elsewhere. Out of the green meadows and shining waters rises gray and hoary. Its crumbling decay gave the atmosphere that heightened Angel's melancholy, and the wicked pictures inside, with their suggestions of a bad inheritance in Tess, made much of whatever case he had. The mill, where he was a temporary pupil, lies along the stream eastward, by Bindon Abbey, amid the ruins of which is the graveyard with the abbot's tomb, in which he laid her in the sleep-walking scene. Her way home after their separation lay by Weatherbury (Puddletown), Nuzzlebury (Haselbury Bryan), and thence into the Vale.

Her wanderings then began anew, first to Port Bredy (Bridport), afterwards to the upland farm at Flintcomb Ash, in the centre of the county. The bare, unkindly place, where the maturer Tess felt, not for the first time, the sorrow, but all the hardness of life, is in the neighbourhood of Plush. No wonder Marion and she would look south-eastward to the Var valley, where they had known kindlier days. When she was sent off with the blessings and the proud touches of Marion and Izz, on the visit to Angel's home, her road lay first northward to the boundary ridge of the Vale, then westward above the Minternes (I give the probable translations of the names where necessary, for all are not disguised), skirting High Stoy, to Cross in Hand, near the boundary of Sydling and Batcombe parishes, where the stone pillar with the hand carved on it 'stands desolate and silent, to mark the site 'of a miracle or murder, or both.' Farther on she crossed Long Ash Lane, and dipped

down to Evershott, then westward through a gentler country by Benville Lane to Beaminster, where Parson Clare ministered. Frightened by the overheard words of Mercy Chant and the brothers Clare, she took the fifteen mile road back again, without fulfilling her errand. It was at Evershott she recognised Alec D'Urberville in the ranting preacher, and at the old pagan monument of Cross in Hand, he made her swear, with a strange irony, never to tempt him from his mission by her charms. Family troubles brought her to Marlott again, and turned the Durbeyfields adrift on the world. They sought a new home at Kingsbere (Bere Regis), an earlier possession of their ancestors than Woolbridge. It was on Old Lady Day they made the move, meeting 'many other 'waggons with families on the summit of 'the load, which was built on a well-nigh 'unvarying principle, as peculiar, probably, 'to the rural labourer, as the hexagon to the 'bee. The ground-work of the arrangement

‘ was the family dresser, which, with its  
‘ shining handles, and finger marks, and  
‘ domestic evidences thick upon it, stood  
‘ importantly in front, over the tails of the  
‘ shaft-horses, in its erect and natural position,  
‘ like some Ark of the Covenant that they  
‘ were bound to carry reverently.’ Mr. Hardy  
has described the same scene elsewhere,  
in his article on ‘The Dorset Labourer’;  
and the sight is indeed a striking one,  
strangely compounded of melancholy and  
hope. Under the churchyard wall of ‘the  
‘ half-dead townlet’ of Bere, the waggon was  
unloaded, since D’Urberville, to gain his  
private ends, had frustrated their plan of  
taking lodgings. By the south wall of the  
fine old church, the family tester was set up,  
under the traceried window of many lights,  
blazoned with the names and arms of the  
Turbervilles. The ubiquitous villain turned  
up ; the family were saved from penury, and  
Tess’s tragedy moved fast. She passed then  
to Sandbourne, that is, Bournemouth. Her

escape with Angel lay north through the New Forest to Salisbury and Stonehenge. The last scene of all was at Winchester, out of which Angel and Liza-Lu walked hand-in-hand.

Winchester plays a part in a minor drama. In the most convenient of towns 'for medi-  
'tative people to live in; since there you  
'have a Cathedral with a nave so long that  
'it affords space in which to walk and summon  
'your remoter moods without continually  
'turning on your heel, or seeming to do more  
'than take an afternoon stroll under cover  
'from the rain and the sun,' there, in the Cathedral itself, did Sir Ashley Mottisfont ask in marriage Philippa, 'the gentle daughter  
'of plain Squire Okehall'; and thus made a home, for the time, for the poor shuttle-cocked Dorothy.

Near Aldbrickham (Reading) lies the village whence Sophy was taken out of her sphere to which she would fain have returned, had not her rigid son put his veto on her

marriage with the honest greengrocer. To other outlying parts, Toneborough and Exonbury (Taunton and Exeter), Mr. Millborne returned to expiate his youthful wrong-doing, an expiation which had consequences of a kind to shake the foundations of any ordinary conscience. The Lady Icenway hailed from this side too, from 'one o' the greenest bit ' of woodlands between Bristol and the city ' of Exonbury,' and the Honourable Laura's adventures took place on the wild north coast of Lower Wessex.

Thus, through the Wessex novels we trudge many roads, and through varied landscapes. And if the mere identification of localities be but of minor interest, in the course of it there is abundant illustration of the part that scene and landscape play in Mr. Hardy's dramas, a part of much consequence to the characters, and often hardly subordinate to them.

POINT OF VIEW





## X

### POINT OF VIEW

IT is an unsatisfactory kind of homage to attempt to construct a complex system of thought from a novelist's pictures of life. He can retort on your blunders by saying he only holds up a mirror and catches reflections. But, at least, the mind and the eye and the angle of vision concern the reflections. And Mr. Hardy has a special point of view, by which I do not mean a theory of art, but a theory of life at least consistent enough to give an interest to his work apart from its artistic value. To treat the Wessex novels merely as scenic and dramatic representations is to ignore one of their vital characteristics. This point of view is not

completely expounded. It is a matter of temperament perhaps as much as of opinion ; but it asserts itself with a pervasive force from which no reader can escape.

(To call him pessimist is short and easy ; only it hides half the truth. He is so, of course, but with a difference. Yet in insisting on the difference one cannot slur over the pessimism ; he is particularly emphatic about it himself. From his survey of the world he has concluded that life is gay only so long as its conditions are unknown, that real happiness is incompatible with fearless thought and the knowledge that science has made common property of the shortcomings of natural laws, which cripple human powers, and the defects of which no human devotion can remedy. It is noticeable that to almost all his tragic characters he has given the power and habit of thinking.) There are darker views of the present compatible with a different conclusion, if the ills of life are held to be not the necessary symptoms of

faulty laws of nature, but of a rotten social system, curable by time and revolution and the inculcation of a keener sense of moral responsibility. (Mr. Hardy would probably use 'alleviation' instead of 'cure,' though his pessimism has never taken away his belief in the usefulness of human struggle. You will find many utterances scattered up and down his writings sympathetic with the reforming spirit; and 'Tess' is, of course, a defiant challenge to the world to revise a cruel social code—a defiance which despair alone could not emit.)

Never did a novelist feel less compelled to invent happy endings. He would say he invents no endings, but gives the natural ones, according to his experience of life. Clym's life is wrecked by an unselfish and inevitable devotion to what was alien to him; Troy has the love of women, not John, or Giles; Gabriel only comes to his own after the zest of life has departed from him and Bathsheba; the Mayor dies alone in poverty

after efforts that Farfrae would never need to make ; Marty is left with a grave to keep ; the repentance of Millborne brings his ruin ; Tess, born for sheltered domesticity, dies a felon's death. Examples come thickly on the memory. Mr. Hardy's emphatic lack of cheerful complacency in his final view of life has effectually barred his way to a very wide popularity +

*haec ratio plerumque videtur tristior esse  
quibus non est tractata, retroque volgus  
abhorret ab hac.*

The sum of his reflections, and the conclusion to be drawn from his examples, are not gay. But they are not dispiriting, and never brought on a coward mood. The only really dispiriting thing in the world is cynicism, and though satire and bitter irony are frequent with Mr. Hardy, of cynicism he utters not a word. The tragic, his deepest note, is furthest of all from the cynical, for it recognises in the fragile, battered thing called life the stirrings and impulses of greatness. Life

is not little, nor cheap, nor easily found out. And its path is lined with interest.) Since it has to be walked, why shut your eyes to the excellent entertainment by the way? The permutations and combinations of human motive and instinct and conduct are infinite. Its problems and dramas are innumerable; your simplest neighbour has an ocean of the unexpected in him, and provides continual comedy. (If the novelist has any clear moral duty to perform, it is to show that life is strong enough in interest to make it worth while living. This Mr. Hardy has done abundantly. And not only has he shown it as full of interest, but also of beauty.) The road to dusty death is warmed by the sun; the sap rises in the wayside trees every year; the spring wind on the down, the fresh life in the grass, are, while experience of them lasts, just as real as sorrow, and it would be the foolishlest asceticism that would shut the doors of the heart on them. There is another reality, too, the need in a

vexing world of sympathy ; and thus all reasons for cynicism are taken away. Mr. Hardy has faced the sadness of life, and spoken it. We may wish he had felt less cause to express it so frequently. He cannot offer, as does his countryman Barnes, the consolation in the dream of 'a year that's 'winterless, where glassy waters never vrose.' But, even for those who accept his conclusions as truth, by urging and proving the interest and beauty of the world he has taken the worst part of the curse away.]

[And his pessimism does not mean a placid acceptance of the ills of life.] The patience, or it may be, the low vitality, that marks some sad-voiced exponents of the view, is not his. You never feel enervated as after a course of Russian fiction. He is often in revolt : otherwise he would be no tragedian.] Perhaps placidity and indifference would be more logical in the looker-on at so imperfect a world ; but men of vigour are not made that way. Human nature and Nature's laws

are so little in accord that the complete subjection of the heart and tongue of man is impossible except from sheer fatigue. He will not mock at the creatures who sin and suffer in consequence of decrees misunderstood or contradictory. In his revolt and in his resignation he cries to whatever powers may be,

‘ For all the sin wherewith the Face of Man  
Is blackened—Man’s forgiveness give—and take !’

Save where men continue to thwart and narrow the remaining chances of life, he takes side with humanity against the Olympians.

Mr. Hardy is not a moralist. But inferentially he inculcates some things that are of importance to morality, and nearly all of these, when applied, are weapons hurled at the conventions. The hatefulness of cant everywhere, but especially in morals, where no rule-of-thumb is of service, but heart and mind must continually be exercised ; the cowardice of mere propriety, and all obedience to something learnt in other circum-

stances instead of something felt in these ; the cruelty of class prejudice, he has abundantly satirised. ] And, on this moral side, it is of particular interest to note in a novelist whose frequent theme is the caprice, the weakness, the wandering nature of human-kind, his unshaken faith in the power that the ideal has over human hearts, over the elect, who will always be few, but who will not fail, from one generation to another. [ He is never sceptical about the power of spiritual reward, seeming to regard the 'absolute 'gratuitousness' of any ideal act, like Mr. Millborne's reparation, in 'For Conscience 'Sake,' 'as being a special inducement to perform it.' [ Indeed there is a rare mixture of hope and belief in Mr. Hardy's dark views. His humanism is not merely an intellectual or dramatic interest in the doings and motives of men ; with it are mingled trust and sympathy. ) Man's nature is, as he says, in what reads like a fine version of Pascal, 'neither 'ghastly, hateful, nor ugly ; neither common-



‘ place, unmeaning, nor tame, but . . . slighted  
‘ and enduring ; and withal singularly colossal  
‘ and mysterious.’ The troubles of men he  
will not always treat as sordid maladies; but  
as honourable scars, ‘ *misères de grand sei-*  
‘ *gneur.*’ He has laughed at human nature,  
but he has never belittled it.]

So much for the temper underlying his  
more serious work. But in the material  
which he uses to show the tragedy and the  
comedy of life his point of view is just as  
much involved. (Mr. Hardy recognises, with-  
out apology, the passion in human nature in  
a franker way) than any of the other greater  
English novelists save the two elder Brontës.  
Till recently, English fiction was singularly  
lacking in its delineation, or in the present-  
ment of the moral questions of which it is  
the source. Where strong passions form the  
motives of stories in the great period, as they  
do, scenically, in Scott, and with more per-  
sonal intensity in Thackeray, they are mostly  
imagined on conventional lines, and as paying

due deference to social laws. This is perhaps the normal condition of things. Very likely we shall come back to it when the old order is reaccepted, or a new one established. But the fiction of a day when every law is weighed in the balance, and many are found wanting, is bound to be morally experimental and turbulent. Scott and Thackeray lived in stirring enough times, but the ferments then were political rather than moral. The forces of the Revolution first touched, for a few, poetry, for the many, politics. Only a small number of peculiarly impressionable souls, like Shelley, were stirred to investigate and question the adequacy of the accepted moral code. Practical England had settled that long ago in a way no scatter-brained poet could disturb. The wave of change swept into the political world, swamping, disintegrating, with a long, steady force, and then into the religious one no less strongly. It has reached the world of morals at last.

The recognition of the right, or, at least, of the might, of passion, and of the importance of sexual questions in modern English novels, are two parallel but widely different facts. Unhappily, only the latter is real to any very great extent. [The problems of the sexes are of keen present interest, affecting as they do everybody to some extent.] The solutions attempted, and the examples presented, are often false and frivolous, but the interest they represent is real enough, a fatiguing reality, perhaps, but one that has to be faced till the intelligent acceptance of some code, old or new, be a general fact. Stories of great passions are common, too, as blackberries, but it is not only their presentment that is artificial. They are mostly hollow altogether. For passion, the genius of the human heart, is by no means a common thing. Perhaps not only in appearance, but in fact, is the English race passionless, with capacities for breeding great exceptions. Even in our earlier fiction, which was

assuredly far from reticent, it is by no means a conspicuous note. The dramatists chose their examples mostly from warmer skies, and it was only rare natures they endowed with the capacity, not the average men and women born in the brain of average novelists. It exists, nevertheless, among a cold and a practical people, and though the taboo has not been taken off its expression, it is recognised, with feverish feebleness, by many, and with the direct force that belongs to it by a few. In the social ferment it has been re-discovered as a tremendous human power existing in life, rarely but very really, outside poetry, this very day as well as in the early world, material for fiction as well as for opera.

In considering France, the other principal fiction-producing country, it would be absurd to name the social ferment as bringing passion, with the moral questions involved, into prominence. It has never sought justification there. And the second influence on

our freer-spoken novel of to-day is, of course, a French one. This is not the place to acknowledge our literary debt to France. It is enough to say that French novelists emphasised the fact that English ones were missing great human chances by keeping whole chapters of the book of life unwritten—chapters just as moral or non-moral as the others already disclosed. The gratitude of English readers for the greater frankness and wider compass of French fiction has too often ended in indiscriminating admiration. A native manufacture of the thing has been set up from an English translation of the French receipt. The supply is hardly a matter for congratulation. For the passion and the revolt from conventional morals in modern French literature are not mere frank recognitions of a reality. The thing is absurdly overdone. It has swamped the rest of life's interests. It has become partly a trick and partly a mania, and it ends by boring us inextinguishably till we are ready to put up

equal claims for any of the other human activities as material for the novelist, for money-getting, tiger-hunting, gold-digging, prize-fighting, or horse-racing. Needless to say, the great writers of fiction have hardly ever left us in this mood, for they have that essential sincerity which in an artistic sense is the concomitant of supreme talent. But the detestablest thing on earth is simulated passion; the most unwholesome, the stupidest, its manufacture for trade purposes. And one of the chief inconveniences of this cheap erotic fiction, and of the handling of delicate moral problems by bunglers, is that for a time, long enough to cause annoyance, the false is confused with the real and brings on it reproach. For the weak dabblers in this dangerous research the real students, with their fingers on human hearts and pulses, are made responsible. Mr. Hardy has suffered in this way.

From the beginning he sounded the note of human passion. The persons in the fore-

ground of his dramas are chosen from beyond the commonplace, and they mostly play their parts in 'those sequestered spots outside the gates of the world, where may usually be found more meditation than action, and more listlessness than meditation ; where reasoning proceeds on narrow premises, and results in inferences wildly imaginative ; yet where, from time to time, dramas of a grandeur and unity truly Sophoclean, are enacted in the real, by virtue of the concentrated passions and closely-knit interdependence of the lives therein.' In 'Tess,' it takes a more prominent place only because there it is argued about. Probably Mr. Hardy's point of view has altered little. That his passions are realities has never been challenged, and it has never been stated in so many words that he should not deal with love at white heat, only that he might slur or veil its expression a little more. It is an old contest, which it is best to leave as a choice or a question. Mr. Hardy pre-

fers frankness. But good taste is compatible with a large degree of frankness, and considering his unconventional views, and the boldness of his ventures, his reticence is much more remarkable than his freedom. And his claim, implied and expressed, for liberty of speech he has not abused. The chronicling of sordid detail, the childish pride in being audacious and outrageous, are not temptations for him. Perhaps there is no novelist with whom a love of beauty has been a more persistent force: it has kept him in wholesome ways. Accidental horrors and uglinesses have hardly any place in his work at all. Only, where a thing touches human life closely enough to make it worth representation in a story, it has been thought worthy of truthful expression. If it be a warm thing, a warm word is used, and he is not much concerned whether it be in drawing-room vocabularies or not. In the criticisms of Mr. Hardy's work the word 'coarse' occurs from time to time applied



to his language. The instances are not many where one could identify the words complained of unless by assuming a rigidly conventional mood. The main point is that, if identified, they are found not to be used idly. They are finger-posts to a reality which otherwise the timid reader would slur, and for slurring or shrinking this novelist very much in earnest has no desire. Mr. Hardy has never skulked.

The second request made of story-writers who deal in the inconvenient thing called passion, is that they should show up its inconvenience, and indeed give it adequate punishment. Now, although Mr. Hardy would not often be in a mood to oblige this kind of critic, he is bound to be in agreement with him here. For passion is so unsatisfied and eternally tragic a thing, hurting itself against circumstances too narrow to contain it, thrust back and foiled continually, that pain is its twin-brother, even though it burst into no wild deed calling for the exercise of

the law. The immortals have arranged all that. In some modern English novels held to be particularly elevating, the hero or heroine after giving way to the inundations of passion reappears when the wave has passed, never a penny the better or worse or different. Such ignorance of the ravages as of the exaltation of passion is an immorality of which Mr. Hardy is quite incapable. It is no plaything with him. Boldwood, Tess, Clym, Eustacia, and its other victims, pay the full penalty always, because human laws demand it, and he cannot save them. But he has great pity for those for whom the world has little mercy.

The justification or glorification of passion is, however, not the most serious criticism that has been brought against him. He is charged with a preference for such subjects as stimulate the senses. This is worth while bringing to proof, and one looks over the novels to see what character to give over to the severities of the censor, and what situa-

tions one would like to reconstruct on a more moral basis. Surely Miss Aldclyffe, poor storm-tossed soul, may be left in peace. Lord Mountclere is a disagreeable old gentleman of a conventional type, but his path was not an easy one after he married Ethelberta. De Stancy is certainly unwholesome. One is inclined to make him the scapegoat, place the highly respectable book in which he figures on the Index, and enjoy this outrage on the proprieties of Paula and Somerset. Viviette is not healthy in soul: in that her unnatural circumstances have their natural consequence. The Noble Dames are of a day of freer manners than ours, but their freedoms are scrupulously translated into words that will offend as little as possible the straiter morals of the present. Charles Raye of 'On the Western Circuit,' stands out readier than most for absolute condemnation; but he is expressly treated as no hero: only a little pity is shown him in the strange situation into which, by an unforeseen path, his

fault has led him. Alec D'Urberville, the type of sensuality in its most undiluted form, is surely an awful warning ; and is poor Tess, because her heart was surcharged with a good thing, and her person had attractions which, being of moment in her history, are chronicled, to be held accurst? She can suggest evil thoughts only to the vile. Yet, to be candid, in the search for instances to support the criticism, one must own to finding a good deal that is, at least, morbid.

Mr. Hardy is certainly not coerced by the influences of his time, but certain features of it he reflects ; the psychology of love is a study of the day, and the neurotic and the abnormal have inevitable attractions for the student of the workings of the human mind. From this scientific interest spring 'Squire Petrick's Lady,' 'On the Western Circuit,' and 'An Imaginative Woman.' The only way to escape from the influence is to write of wild adventure, to use love superficially as a mere starting-point or goal,

of no real interest in the actual running of the romance.] Excellent things are these tales of adventure, but not what he was called to write. And the head and front of his offending is that, more from his hatred of the commonplace than his preference for the morbid, he has put some of his men and women in strange situations, where wholesome thoughts could hardly grow, and that, when the animal nature or superficial attractions, apart from the heart and brain, have been the motive power, he has said so. He has dissected mental maladies without bungling; he has not exaggerated them, though they are a more frequent theme in his later books. The only real immorality possible in art is untruth. Mr. Hardy out of unhealthy soil makes strange growths proceed. To lack of restraint and sin he may not always give the pedagogic punishment the moralist might dictate, but they have their inevitable and adequate consequence. Social law may be held in contempt, but it is never ignored.

Against this morbidity must be placed at least two-thirds of his work, all his utterance of the laughter of life, of the beauty of the face of the outer world, and his delicate portrayal of that other human nature whose emotions live in an atmosphere of cool, transparent purity, untempted from within, simple, patient and staunch. Dick Dewy, Gabriel, Giles, Marty, Elizabeth-Jane, are as real as Troy and Eustacia, and as characteristic of the mind of their maker. (Only, he refuses to condemn passion, or even to apologise for it; indeed, justifies it, or any other strong impulse of nature till it be proved by reason, not convention, cruel and anti-social in its indulgence.) There are uses for every natural force, and though asceticism and Puritanism, and every repressing creed and code have borne flowers fair and fine, that does not alter the fact that nature will be corrupted rather more than less by starvation and an underground life.

This claim for greater freedom to man's

nature does not, as has been seen, accompany a very light-hearted view of things. His occasional grim earnestness, his intellectual cast of mind, his brooding thoughtfulness, his austerity, make all the more remarkable his clear perception of the comedy in life. His tolerance, indeed his enjoyment, of caprice and vanity and all the feather-headed human moods and ways, if only they be young and graceful, may seem difficult to fit in with his theory of the world. But in truth they are the woof-threads of a sane and liveable philosophy.

The observations on men and things scattered in reflections about his novels, or translated into characters and incidents, are not of the kind best learnt in social assemblies. The shrewdness of the man of the world is very little evident. He has scanned human features as well as hearts with keenest gaze, and his intercourse with men seems never to have been languid. But his best thought reflects a mind that has lived its

intensest life apart. He is independent and profound rather than brilliant. It is just this aloofness, revealing itself in wisdom and in beauty that have had leisure and quiet to grow in, that has given coherence and consistency to his novels, and made it worth while trying to examine his point of view at all.

Not that he has posed as philosopher, or even as poet. Indeed, it is hardly fitting to force him into either part, and thus take leave of him. Story-teller, picture-maker, humourist, it is entertainment he offers us. Only, the stories he has heard, and imagined, and told us, have interpreted life to him, and he lets us overhear the commentary sometimes. And behind his vivid representations of the human comedy is visible something greater : a poetic intention which his art has abundantly fulfilled.









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